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# **The Bücher-Meyer Controversy**

*The Nature of the Ancient  
Economy in Modern Ideology*

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by

**André Reibig**

**Thesis Submitted in Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of Doctor of  
Philosophy in the Faculty of Arts**

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**January 2001**

## **THE BÜCHER-MEYER CONTROVERSY**

## **Abstract**

### **The Bücher-Meyer Controversy: the Nature of the Ancient Economy in Modern Ideology**

The Bücher-Meyer Controversy is a famous debate about the fundamental character of the ancient economy. The disagreement arose with Karl Bücher's thesis that the ancient economy apparently never overcome the economic stage of the 'closed household economy', which the author formulated in his 1893 publication '*The Formation of the National Economy*'. Bücher's stance stimulated immediately rigorous rejections from the elite scholars of ancient history. Eduard Meyer and Karl Julius Beloch both dismissed Bücher's claim being an unscientific and ill-founded description of the ancient economy. Both assumed instead that some periods in ancient history are economically comparable with early modern capitalism. Part I investigates the arguments on both sides and aims to highlight some initial misunderstandings and methodological divergences between the opposed positions, which would have negative consequences for the future course of the debate.

What initially may appear a highly subject specific debate with no wider academic relevance turned quickly into a bitter feud between the established historicist historiography, which dominated ancient history and the increasingly popular empiricist conceptual approaches in political economy, sociology and psychology. The swift rejection of Bücher's stance also highlighted the serious difficulty for social and cultural history to win scientific credibility against the long-established and predominant political historiography. However, the debate about the proper scientific historiographical method, which accompanied the Bücher-Meyer Controversy, brought to light a variety of additional, often deep rooted ideological disagreements within the German academic community, which were fuelled by the highly sensitive 'national' and 'social question' in Germany at the turn of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. The turbulent political and social climate frequently called the purpose of classical and historical scholarship into question and by doing so elevated the Bücher-Meyer Controversy beyond being merely an intellectual debate about the nature of the ancient economy. These issues are discussed in Part II.

Max Weber's contribution to ancient history and his theory of concept formation in history aimed to overcome the rift between Bücher and Meyer that was dependent on the methodological and ideological differences surrounding these scholars. In order to do so,

Weber aimed to develop Bücher's weakly defined concept of the 'closed household economy' into an 'ideal type'. On the other hand, Weber learned from Meyer's complex and differentiated view of antiquity and described antiquity as a 'slave, city and coastal culture'. It is argued that Weber did not hold a 'middle position' between Bücher and Meyer as it has been frequently assumed. Rather, by constructing the 'ideal type' as a practical methodological tool, he added a new dimension to all previous attempts of characterising the ancient economic history. This is outlined in Part III.1.

Unfortunately Weber was unable to offer a solution to the controversy which was acceptable to both sides. During the 1920s the issues surrounding the ancient economy were further debated mainly by Friedrich Oertel, Johannes Hasebroek, Bernard Laum and Michael I. Rostovtzeff, unfortunately without the analytical depth and methodological rigour that was propounded by Max Weber. The aftermath of the controversy will be outlined in Part III.2.

The abuse of ancient history, along with almost every other academic discipline in Nazi Germany, made a possible solution to the controversy ever more unlikely. Whilst contemporary scholars refer to the controversy usually only in brief and whilst they seem to be unified in branding Bücher's and Meyer's position as extreme or over-simple, this work aims to revisit the old arguments and the highly complex background of the controversy and will compare them with the often false and oversimplified interpretation of the debate in the contemporary literature. The bibliography section provides a comprehensive list of all relevant publications regarding the controversy and its surrounding issues.

The importance of the material conditions of human life and the role of antiquity in general to provide possible parallels for modern social phenomena kept this debate alive throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Unfortunately, a solution to the controversy seems still not in sight. However, one of the reasons could be the lack of clarity and appreciation of Bücher's and Meyer's contributions that would certainly be beneficial for acknowledging that the Bücher-Meyer Controversy is a significant example for showing that debates about history are not merely fought for the sake of historical truths, but also on the grounds of ideological and political differences that in turn have significance for a particular interpretation of history.

## ***Acknowledgement***

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## Abbreviations

<i>Agrarverhältnisse im Altertum (Weber)</i>	AA
<i>Das Kapital (Marx)</i>	Cap.
<i>Die Entstehung der Volkswirtschaft (Bücher)</i>	EdV
<i>Die Geschichte der Soziale Frage und des Sozialismus in der Antiken Welt (Pöhlmann)</i>	Soziale Frage
<i>Die Großindustrie im Altertum (Beloch)</i>	DGA
<i>Die Römische Agrargeschichte in ihrer Bedeutung für das Staats- und Privatrecht (Weber)</i>	RA
<i>Die Sklaverei im Altertum (Meyer)</i>	SA
<i>Die Sozialen Gründe des Untergangs der Antiken Kultur (Weber)</i>	Gründe
<i>Die Wirtschaftliche Entwicklung des Altertums (Meyer)</i>	WEaA
<i>Gesammelte Aufsätze zur Sozial- und Wirtschaftsgeschichte (Weber)</i>	GASW
<i>Gesammelte Aufsätze zur Wissenschaftlehre (Weber)</i>	GAW
<i>Geschichte des Altertums (Meyer)</i>	GdA
<i>Grundriß zu den Vorlesungen über Allgemeine ("theoretische") Nationalökonomie (Weber)</i>	GVAN
<i>Historische Zeitschrift</i>	HZ
<i>Jahrbücher für Nationalökonomie und Statistik</i>	JfNS
<i>Max Weber Gesamtausgabe</i>	MWG
<i>The Nicomachean Ethics (Aristotle)</i>	NE
<i>Pauly's Realencyclopädie der Klassischen Altertumswissenschaft</i>	RE
<i>Politics (Aristotle)</i>	Pol.
<i>Probleme der Wirtschaftsgeschichte (Below)</i>	PW
<i>Rheinisches Museum</i>	RM
<i>Schmollers Jahrbuch für Gesetzgebung und Volkswirtschaftlehre</i>	SJ
<i>Social and Economic History of the Roman Empire (Rostovtzeff)</i>	SEHRE
<i>Social and Economic History of the Hellenic World (Rostovtzeff)</i>	SEHHW
<i>Staat und Handel Im Alten Griechenland (Hasebroek)</i>	SAG
<i>Vierteljahrschrift für Sozial- und Wirtschaftsgeschichte</i>	VjSW
<i>Wirtschaft und Gesellschaft (Weber)</i>	WG
<i>Zeitschrift für die Gesamte Staatswissenschaft</i>	ZfGS
<i>Zur Griechischen Wirtschaftsgeschichte (Beloch)</i>	GriWi
<i>Zur Griechischen Wirtschaftsgeschichte (Bücher)</i>	ZGW
<i>Zur Theorie und Methode der Geschichte (Meyer)</i>	THEORIE

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## General Introduction and Methodology

This thesis has four inter-related aims.

Firstly, to elucidate the arguments between Karl Bücher and Eduard Meyer about the nature of the ancient economy in detail and to contrast them with the contemporary interpretation of this famous controversy. Paul Millett in his book *Lending and Borrowing in Ancient Athens* asserted in the introduction that ‘in view of the surveys of the controversy that already exist, there is no need to rehearse the arguments in full.’<sup>1</sup> Millett is referring us to a number of publications that, at best, summarise aspects of this controversy and in some cases are schematising and oversimplifying the debate as one between ‘primitivism vs. modernism’. It seems that the positions of Bücher and Meyer as well as other earlier participants are judged in the contemporary literature as dated and false. This explains why so few scholars have bothered to analyse the arguments afresh, and in all their historiographical complexity, beyond introductory sketches. We aim to deliver a more complex account, which is required for an appropriate understanding of the controversy in its almost ‘classical significance’ in the history of historiography.<sup>2</sup>

Secondly, we will analyse the methodological complicity of Bücher’s and Meyer’s stances in the light of the wider controversy about the proper scientific character of the historical investigation and concept formation. The way in which ideological and political differences, as well as contemporary issues, played a part in the course of the debate will be detailed.

Thirdly, we will attempt to elucidate and clarify Max Weber’s contribution to this debate. We hope to show that Weber’s suggestions for solving the question of the character of the ancient economy is not simply a compromise or ‘middle position’ between Bücher and Meyer, as Demandt and others have maintained.<sup>3</sup> We will also shed light onto Weber’s highly complex methodology of historical sociology and investigate in how far it affected his view of the character of the ancient economy.

Finally, we will summarise the aftermath of the Bücher-Meyer Controversy during the 1920s and 1930s. The challenge for us is to investigate in what way the continuing debate over the reorientation of historical scholarship has influenced the arguments over

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<sup>1</sup> Milltett (1991) p. 9 f.

<sup>2</sup> Bürgin (1993) p. 68

<sup>3</sup> Demandt in Caler III (1990) p. 144

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the nature of the ancient economy. By doing so, we hoped to show why this debate, which may appear at first glance only a highly specialised academic quarrel, achieved the interdisciplinary prominence which it still has for us today.

Regarding the methodology employed in this work, we face an inevitable difficulty. The subject of the history of historiography is a very recent field of academic interest. It tends to reflect on methodological issues surrounding the historical scholarship and the nature of the historical explanation and concept formation. We propose to discuss the Bücher-Meyer Controversy and selected further contributions to this subject by other scholars, by assuming that historical scholarship and the method that is propagated along with it, is in parts influenced by popular epistemological interests and the *Zeitgeist* that accompany this subject. The observations and analyses put forward in this work are of course not excluded from our own historical dependencies that partly form our interpretation of the Controversy. In addition, when translating phrases and quotations from German into English, which were written by scholars over a hundred years ago, we will perhaps encounter the difficulty of finding adequate expressions for what they may have had in mind. This is because the concepts and language as a whole are also undergoing historical change.

It is hoped that the Selected Bibliography will provide the reader with a solid source from late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century writings in German historiography about the ancient economy and the Bücher-Meyer Controversy.

## Part I. Bücher vs. Meyer - The Arguments of the Controversy

‘Every existing thing is an analogy of everything existing, that is why our existence appears to us as separate and connected at the same time. If one follows an analogy too much, then everything falls identically together; if one avoids it, then everything is scattered into infinity. In both cases contemplation stagnates, at one time as over-lively, some other time as dead’.

JOHANN WOLFGANG VON GOETHE

## Introduction

The Bücher-Meyer Controversy was sparked off by the German economist Karl Bücher with his publication *‘Die Entstehung der Volkswirtschaft’* (‘The Formation of the National Economy’) [*EdV*] of 1893 and by the reply of the ancient historian, Eduard Meyer, entitled *‘Die Wirtschaftliche Entwicklung des Altertums’* (‘The Economic Development of Antiquity’) [*WEaA*] of 1885. As indicated in the ‘General Introduction’, the contemporary scholarship regarded the debate as being based on misunderstandings and problematic premises. This part attempts to bring alive the old arguments central to Bücher’s and Meyer’s position, which found their way only in a highly condensed form into contemporary scholarship.

Chapter 1 shall deal extensively with Bücher’s arguments and aims to defy the commonly accepted view that Bücher was a ‘primitivist’ in the sense that he had claimed that the entire ancient economy was underdeveloped and indigent. We aim to show that Bücher directed his concerns against what he understood to be ‘modernising’ tendencies within the interpretation of sources.

By looking at Meyer’s arguments and methodological presuppositions in Chapter 2, we shall inquire whether Bücher’s criticism is well founded. Also, Meyer was frequently accused of having maintained that the whole of antiquity corresponded to modern capitalism. By maintaining such an analogy, he was accused of modernising the entire ancient ‘economic life’.<sup>4</sup> We shall question in this chapter whether Meyer, besides the construction of a complex picture of a sophisticated classical and Hellenic civilisation, indeed projected modern political and economic concepts into this age.

Finley’s collection of essays ‘The Bücher-Meyer Controversy’ also includes two articles by the German historian Karl Julius Beloch, a contemporary of Bücher and friend of Meyer. Beloch’s name appears also in the context of the controversy, as he shares Meyer’s opposition to Bücher’s methodology and liberal political orientation.<sup>5</sup> Although Beloch’s evaluation of the ancient economy is perhaps less central to the controversy, aspects of Beloch’s theory are highly original and mark an important milestone in the historiography of ancient history. It will also be interesting to see how Beloch dealt with

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<sup>4</sup> See Humphreys (1978) p. 137, Love (1991) p. 34. Pearson (1957) p. 7 ff. See also Ausitn & Vidal-Naquet (1977) p. 3 f., who argued that the debate is primarily about ‘modernism’ vs. ‘primitivism’

<sup>5</sup> There is fairly little assessment on Karl Julius Beloch’s work. However, see Christ’s biographical study

Bücher's theory of economic development (Chapter 3).

In Chapter 4 we shall investigate whether in the direct aftermath of Meyer's harsh criticism, Bücher was prepared to make any concessions and modifications to his own position and what impact Bücher's reply to Meyer had on the further course of the controversy. The relevance of the 'Biographical Note' on Bücher, Meyer and Beloch at the beginning of each chapter are perhaps for the time being only of informative character, but should foster a better understanding of the origin and the manifold political commitments surrounding the writings of these scholars, which will be further examined in Part II.

## 1. Karl Bücher – the ‘Closed Household Economy’ and the Method of Economic History<sup>6</sup>

### *i. Biographical Note<sup>7</sup>*

Karl Bücher (1847-1930) was born near Wiesbaden as the son of an indigent farmer’s family. Through material austerity and hard work, his father managed to send him to a *Gymnasium*. Bücher’s dreams to study at a university came true when in 1866 he entered the University of Bonn. Initially he wanted to become a *Gymnasium* teacher and started his studies in classical philology and history. After a two-semester spell at Göttingen he returned to Bonn and graduated with a doctoral degree of ancient history and gained teaching qualifications in philology and history. His versatile interests were encouraged with a teaching post at the *Wöhler-Gymnasium Frankfurt* (1873-1878), but soon Bücher started to develop an interest on the theory and method of a new science, *Nationalökonomie*. This new orientation of his academic work is indicated by his participation in the newly established *Verein für Sozialpolitik* (est. 1872). Bücher was a member of this organisation and started to report about the meetings in the liberal newspaper *Frankfurter Zeitung* (today *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*). His new field of interest led him eventually in 1878 to leave his teaching profession and to join this paper as a journalist in the economy and social policy department. Influenced by his friend Alfred Schäffle, Bücher started his postdoctoral degree at Munich and graduated in 1881 in statistics and political economy (*Volkswirtschaftslehre*).<sup>8</sup> After professorships at Dorpat

<sup>6</sup> The life and work of Karl Willhelm Bücher (1847-1930) is not very well documented. The dispute with Eduard Meyer is usually only very briefly commented upon: Most extensively is Braeuer (1950, pp. 205-206), who has summarised Bücher’s work as an political economist and its impact up to its time. It is also unfortunate that only one volume of Bücher’s autobiography was published and ends in the year 1892 - one year before the dispute with Meyer. Other sources, which deal with Bücher’s academic achievements, are Drechsler (1997), Braubach (1963), Lindenlaub (1967) and Heuss (1997) p. 277-285.

<sup>7</sup>The biographical note is largely inspired by Heuss (1957) pp. 277-285. This is also the most detailed biographical sketch of Bücher’s work, which includes a short index of reviews of Bücher’s works. Heuss’ claim (1957 p. 282) that Bücher was influenced by Schäffle with regard to Darwin’s theory of evolution and Hegel’s philosophy of history is true in so far as Schäffle was a pupil of Hegel in Tübingen and wrote extensively in this tradition. See Braubach (1963) p. 382.

<sup>8</sup> The fruitful intellectual relationship and personal friendship between Schäffle and Bücher is well documented by Braubach (1963).

(1882-83),<sup>9</sup> Basel (1883-90) and a short spell at Karlsruhe (1890-92), he accepted a chair at Leipzig where he taught and lived until his death. His main interests were centred on topics in economic history and publishing studies.<sup>10</sup> Bücher achieved a remarkable career: from a farmer's son to a university professor of international standing, which certainly underlines his intelligence, industriousness, adaptability and determination. However, beside this remarkable steep and unusual career he remained a very modest man, a passionate democrat and a constant advocate of individual liberties and democratic political justice. Besides his renowned achievements as one of the first scholars in publishing studies, he will remain an influential scholar in the field of economic history and historical political economy. His controversial essay collection '*Die Entstehung der Volkswirtschaft*' ('The Emergence of the National Economy'), which also forms one of his major works, shall be the primary source of our investigation below. Besides this influential work, Bücher published a work in 1896 on 'Labour and Rhythm' ('*Arbeit und Rythmus*'), which was one of the first studies in the new field of labour and work psychology.

As one of the co-editors, and after 1903 as senior editor of the *Zeitschrift für die Gesamte Staatswissenschaft*, a post which he held until 1923, Bücher earned himself a permanent remembrance even amongst his intellectual and political opponents.

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<sup>9</sup> See Drechsler (1997).

<sup>10</sup> See Heuss (1957) pp. 175-176. An overview about his works can be found in Braeuer (1934) pp. 718-719, Braeuer (1952) p. 718. See Bücher (1981) on writings in publishing studies.

## ii. *The Emergence of the 'National Economy'*

The controversy emerged from a reply by Eduard Meyer, professor of ancient history at the 'Martin Luther Universität' of Halle, at the 3<sup>rd</sup> *Conference of German Historians* 1895 in Frankfurt, to a previously published paper by Karl Bücher, who had just started his professorship in Political Economy at the University of Leipzig. Bücher's essay dealt with the topic of the nature and the stage of development of the economy of ancient Greece and focused on the classical period in particular. However, to deliver a picture of the character of the entire ancient economy was not his intended aim, though his generalisations were clearly reaching beyond this period. He points out that in the essay collection *EdV* 'all papers are dominated by the uniform view of a law-like course of the economic development and a similar methodological treatment of the facts'.<sup>11</sup>

Based on the *EdV*'s 5<sup>th</sup> edition published in 1906 and reprinted in Finley (1972), Karl Bücher formulated the thesis, which maintained that the formation of the 'national economy' (*Volswirtschaft*) was a result of change between economic stages or modes. In respect of these 'stages of economic development' (*wirtschaftliche Entwicklungsstufen*), the economy of antiquity was labelled by Bücher as an 'integrated or closed household economy' (*geschlossene Hauswirtschaft*).<sup>12</sup> However, it is a common misconception that Bücher denied that Athens and Rome never witnessed the exchange of produce between individuals at a local *agora* or *forum*.<sup>13</sup> 'Geschlossen' is rather the term to explain that the level of production of artefacts was depended on the needs of the household and that the

<sup>11</sup> Bücher (1908) p. 5. Reil (1940) critically reviews the views of the German *Nationalökomen*, such as List, Schmoller Hildebrand, Sombart, Roscher, Knies and Bücher on the idea of economic laws and theories of economic development (*Entwicklungsgesetze*) This point shall be further elaborated under Part II.6. and Part III.2.

<sup>12</sup> Bücher (1906) p. 116. Many contemporary authors use the phrase 'closed household economy' as a direct translation of *geschlossene Hauswirtschaft*. See Millett (1992) p. 11, Pearson (1957) p. 6 and Humphreys (1978) p. 137. Love translated it as 'oikos economy' See Love (1991) p. 34. This translation is perhaps not in accordance with what Bücher intended it to mean. See *EdV* p. 114 ff. For his understanding of 'geschlossen' and compare with the meaning of 'integrated household economy'. The translation of the term 'economy' from the German 'Wirtschaft' bears some difficulty too because of the difference in its etymological roots. It is very difficult to create a term that would be appropriate to the history of this concept in German as 'Wirtschaft'. See A. Demadt (1990) for a short discussion on this problem. Also recently Cartledge (1998) p. 5 'Economy (economies): what's in a name?'

<sup>13</sup> *EdV* p. 109 f. It is important to note that the term 'development' bears an ambiguity. To Bücher it refers to 'Entstehung', also 'formation', but not as in the 1901 English translation as 'evolution'. It is misleading to think that *wirtschaftliche Entwicklung* is equivalent with the suggested title '*Industrial Evolution*'. One could have had expected that Bücher, if he meant evolution for 'Entwicklung', he surely would have used the already popular German word 'Evolution' to make his stance more plain. *Entwicklung* probably means something like continuing process, though 'continuing development' is not supposed to be mistaken with

division of labour never reached a national scale as in the *'Volkswirtschaft'*. Modern scholars reinterpreted the stage of the 'integrated household economy' frequently as the 'primitive' stage of the economy, hence the derivative term 'primitivism'.<sup>14</sup> Bücher himself rarely used the term 'primitive' (*'primitiv'*) and if so usually only in the context of the conditions of the tribal societies.<sup>15</sup> However, in his later work 'On Greek Economic History' (*ZGW*), Bücher pointed out that 'it has always been striking to me that the science of the Hellenics, which knew no human secrets, although making it to a highly developed political theory, but only to a very poor theory of the economy, which remained stuck in ethics. This economy remained always firmly as a private economy. We cannot speak seriously about a theory of the national economy back then'.<sup>16</sup> His contemporaries also often asserted that the 'primitivists' assumed a strictly 'linear economic progress' and that economic evolution is natural, and results in improved efficiency and productivity and is therefore desirable.<sup>17</sup>

In order to prove whether or not the ancient economy possessed the same qualitative characteristics as the modern 'national economy' (*Volkswirtschaft*).<sup>18</sup> Bücher's

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'steady development'

<sup>14</sup> See Millett (1992) p. 16, Wittenburg in Flasher (1995) p. 270, Christ (1983) vol. III p. 103 ff., and Pearson (1957) p. 6 f.

<sup>15</sup> See *EdV* p. 92, Bücher (1898)

<sup>16</sup> *ZGW* (1902) p. 5. See Spahn (1984) p. 301. The context of the *ZGW* allows for an interpretation of the term '*oikos* economy' as a 'private economy' and should not be confused with a modern notion of perhaps 'private business economy'. However, in some way this term invites misunderstanding.

<sup>17</sup> This misconception is still present in contemporary literature See Parkins (1998) p. 234 f and Millett (1992) p. 16 f. Millett also points out that the term primitive 'is a complex term', and should not simply be associated with 'early ancient, old-fashioned, simple...uncivilised' etc. Whether this applies to Bücher and Hasebroek is not quite clear. Whether the term 'primitive' assigned to mean indeed uncivilised or just pre-Western culture reflects nevertheless on the way we are looking at cultures of the past or different to us and leaves in some way a negative coating. 'That, then, would seem to be the motive behind the recurring impulse to present the Greeks as economically sophisticated, which is assumed to mean "capitalistic" or "proto-capitalistic". Millett (1992).p. 17. According to Millett (1992) p. 17, a further aspect to the meaning of 'primitive' was added by 'Lowry's study *The Archaeology of Economic Ideas* (1987). Intrigued by the analogy of "our ancient debts in areas of physics to city planning, politics and philosophy to mathematics to exact sciences" (p. xiv). Millett noted correctly that 'Lowrey attempts to trace the ancient Greek origins of modern economic theory' and that such an effort 'is heroic but misguided'. Millett (1992) p. 17. Millett seems to agree with Firth and Yamey (1964) p. 32 that 'observers of credit operations in the present and primitive societies have often been struck by the great proliferation of credit relationships'. Cited by Millett (1992) p. 17. According to Millett (1992) p. 17. This 'reveals complex networks of lending and borrowing that can hardly be classed as "economic" in the conventional neo-classical sense'. Worth considering on the subject of the nature of the ancient 'economy' is also Polanyi's 'holistic' stance that saw the economy in antiquity as not separable from the political goals and ethos of the city life. See Polanyi (1990). Also interesting is Meikle's distinction between the 'use value' economy of the ancient cities and the classification of the modern capitalist economy as an 'exchange value' economy, with capital accumulation as its primary purpose by the means of commodity production and exchange for profit. See Meikle (1995b) p.103 f, 160 f.

<sup>18</sup> Bücher voiced some self-criticism about the first edition of the *EdV* in 1893. In a letter to Alois Schulte dated 15/03/1893 he admits that by revisiting his essay '*Die Entstehung der Volkswirtschaft*', it still shows some weaknesses. 'I was perhaps a little too light-headed when I undertook the publication', but the work

*EdV* starts off with the question of how the national economy is defined. In order to do so, Bücher defines the *Volkswirtschaft* (literally ‘the people’s economy’) as ‘the totality of events, organisations and processes which bring about the satisfaction of a whole nation’s needs’<sup>19</sup>. It should not be ignored that this ‘national economy’, which Bücher refers to, shows significant differences to contemporary definitions of the ‘market economies’ in the late 20<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>20</sup> Despite the emergence of world trade and international markets, political and national ideas and goals dominated the economic sphere of the Western European countries at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. This is why we should continue to use the term ‘national economy’ when we use the phrase in the Bücherian sense of ‘*Volkswirtschaft*’ as opposed to ‘people’s economy’, which perhaps could misleadingly suggest a kind of ‘state socialist’ economy.

Bücher argues further that if the economist aims to trace the roots of political economy (*Nationalökonomie*), as the science of running the national economy, he must compare it to other forms of economic organisation. Therefore, he asks, ‘is this economy national?’<sup>21</sup> Directed against the ‘Historical School’ of *Nationalökonomie*, Bücher asserts that their followers failed to address this central question. He points out that due to this systematic error, they apply categories and social phenomena of the ‘national economy’ to other stages of economic development. He says, ‘without a doubt did they [the members of the ‘Historical School’], for this very reason, block their way to a scientific handling of those historical events’.<sup>22</sup> By not realising the fundamental difference between these economic stages, the ‘Historical School’ tries to grasp the economic phenomena of the past with modern categories.<sup>23</sup>

For Bücher, to comprehend and analyse economic history properly one should

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was, in his own words ‘for me of very high importance. I am also convinced that I am on the right way. I considered most of what I wrote ten times until I wrote it down. But I also fear that I have overlooked things, that certain points are expressed not brief enough, others not clear enough’. See Braubach (1963) p. 384 f.

<sup>19</sup> Bücher (1906) p. 85.

<sup>20</sup> Rutherford in his Dictionary of Economics defines the market economy ‘as an economy with extensive private ownership of capital and allocation of goods and services by the price mechanism the absence of government intervention. For a market economy to flourish goods must be available in competitive markets at prices which reflect their long run scarcities and business must be motivated by profit’. See Rutherford (1992) p. 287. Whether this is a good description of modern market economies is not relevant for our discussion. This definition, however, exemplifies that the concept of the market economy is not easily applicable the concept of the national economy of the 19<sup>th</sup> century that was used by Bücher and Meyer.

<sup>21</sup> See Bücher (1906) p. 86 ‘Is this economy a national economy? Are its characteristics fundamentally the same or different from ours?’ *EdV* p. 86

<sup>22</sup> *EdV*. p. 87

<sup>23</sup> Bücher’s criticism also attacks some ideological goals of the ‘Historical School’ to which we shall return in Part II and III.

employ a theory of ‘economic stages of development’ (*wirtschaftliche Entwicklungsstufen* or also *Wirtschaftsstufen*), as the essential tool, ‘through which the main-features of economic development are summarised by keywords’.<sup>24</sup> Even if the use of economic stages as an essential methodological tool in order to systemise economic history was not personally invented by Bücher, his argument seems to require at least some further justification. That his ‘theory of economic stages’ (*Wirtschaftsstufentheorie*) is an ‘indispensable methodological auxiliary means’ in order to systematise economic history properly, is a presupposition that is not necessarily true.<sup>25</sup> We could simply argue that one does not have to fall back into a ‘moderniser fallacy’ without using the *Wirtschaftsstufen*.<sup>26</sup> For Bücher, the crucial aspects in order to distinguish the different economic stages qualitatively from one another, were the position and the nature of the commodity exchange and the character of production in each of these stages.<sup>27</sup>

Similar to the economist Gustav Schmoller (1838-1917), Bücher characterises the formation of the modern national economy as a product of a gradual development from the ‘integrated household economy’, the ‘city economy’ to ‘national economy’ (*geschlossene Hauswirtschaft, Stadtwirtschaft* and *Volkswirtschaft*).<sup>28</sup> Bücher identifies each stage eventually with a corresponding stage in human history, which makes his previous attempt

<sup>24</sup> *EdV* p. 97.

<sup>25</sup> *EdV* p. 97. Theories of economic stages were a popular methodological tool in political economy in late 19<sup>th</sup> century Germany mainly due to the reception of Adam Smith and the use of different social modes in his ‘Wealth of Nation’s’. See Braeuer (1952) p. 149 f. Regarding the reception of Adam Smith by the German *Nationalökonomie* see Bürgin (1993) pp 366-390 and Winkel (1977) p. 7 ff., see also Bücher *EdV* p. 89.

<sup>26</sup> Obvious examples are Finley (1973) and Polanyi (1957). These authors profited to a degree from the previous detailed and systematic criticism by Reil (1940).

<sup>27</sup> As emphasised above, theories of economic stages were a highly fashionable methodological tool amongst economists towards the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century and had a rich tradition. Bücher’s predecessors Friedrich List (1789-1846) and Bruno Hildebrand (1812-1878) added more economic aspects to Smith’s initial social stages ‘herdsmen, farming and industrial society’. See Braeuer (1952) p. 149 f. The criteria of defining these stages differed considerable between these scholars. List’s criterion of classification of the economic sphere was the different modes of production an economy was characterised as. He defined the ‘agricultural state’, the ‘agricultural and manufacture state’ and the ‘agricultural-manufacture-commercial state’. Hildebrand divided economic history into ‘barter economy’ (*Naturalwirtschaft*), ‘money economy’ (*Geldwirtschaft*) and ‘credit economy’ (*Kreditwirtschaft*) See Schneider (1990) p. 419 f. For more detail see Reil (1940) p. 17-18. The fundamental error, which List and Hildebrand committed, according to Bücher, was that they admitted economic change only in different forms of production and exchange (*Verkehr*) in different periods of human civilisation, but that the basic characteristics of economic life remained unchanged to the present day. This is to say that the former authors already saw a kind of ‘*Volkswirtschaft*’ in antiquity. See. Reil (1940) p. 21. Bücher regarded this as a fundamental and consequential mistake by these and other members of the ‘Historical School’, a ‘mistake’ which led to a whole tradition in the interpretation of economic history and is often referred to as *modernism*. See Wittnburg in Flasher (1995) p. 270, Pearson (1957) p. 6. Humphreys (1978) p. 137, Austin & Vidal-Naquet (1977) p. 3 f., and Will (1954) p 10. This is to say that List and Hildebrand assumed that economic rationality and the mechanisms of demand and supply are constant companions of human social interaction. Only forms of possession and production may have changed.

to separate the economic history from general history rather questionable.<sup>29</sup> Antiquity is clearly associated with the stage of the 'integrated household economy', whereas the 'city economy' applies to the later middle ages.<sup>30</sup> However, as Bücher emphasised, these stages are not to be applied rigidly.<sup>31</sup> According to him, the changes in the character of the economic spheres in different periods of human civilisation took place sometimes over very long periods of time, sometimes very quickly and rapidly, but he also warned that these *Wirtschaftsstufen* 'should not be confused with the *Zeitepochen* in which the historian divides his stuff in'.<sup>32</sup> Bücher adds though, that this method abstracts from any intermediate stages or rudiments of older stages preserved in some remote areas of the modern world and tries to grasp it in its pure essence.<sup>33</sup> Alfred Bürgin has recently asserted that 'no matter how such stages [stages of economic development] are constructed - be it through Friedrich List<sup>34</sup>, Karl Rodbertus<sup>35</sup> or through Gustav Schmoller<sup>36</sup> -, none of this corresponds to a real historical epoch; and Karl Bücher's, the one of the 'integrated household economy..., the city economy and the national economy do not form an adequate picture of the historical development'.<sup>37</sup> In the light of Bücher's intentions mentioned above, to develop a separate and differentiated model to analyse the coming into being of the '*Volkswirtschaft*', this criticism is perhaps based on a misunderstanding of Bücher's theory. Bücher ventured to write a theory of economic development instead of

<sup>28</sup> See Reil (1940) p. 20-21 f.

<sup>29</sup> *EdV* p. 115 f.

<sup>30</sup> Indeed as Finley put it, 'for Bücher the theory of economic stages is a necessary tool' (Finley 1979 p. 84), but it is difficult to see as to why these stages have to be theoretical abstractions of economic life, that are deliberately disconnected from historical periods. Was it Bücher's intention to separate the 'economic reality from the historical processes? Or did he think that historical writings are dealing fundamentally with different objects of inquiry? We should also note that Bücher discusses the concept of 'economy' ('*Wirtschaft*') not as a theoretical concept, but as something historically developed. See his discussion in Bücher (1808) p. 30 ff. We refer to the 6<sup>th</sup> edition of the essay collection *Die Entstehung der Volkswirtschaft* (1908) pp. 5-28. The essay is entitled '*Der Wirtschaftliche Urzustand*'.

<sup>31</sup> That Bücher applied his stages vigorously and rigidly, was later a central point of criticism against him. Bücher points this out at the very beginning of his chapter on the '*Stadtwirtschaft*' in *EdV* (1906) p. 116. See also *EdV* p. 116 n2. and see 'City-types of Five Millennia' ('*Großstadt-Typen aus fünf Jahrtausenden*') in Bücher *EdV* (1908) pp. 355-382.

<sup>32</sup> Bücher (1906) pp. 87-88. Bücher seems to refer here to 'event history' ('*Ereignisgeschichte*'), which identifies historical epochs by aristocratic leadership or war.

<sup>33</sup> See Bücher *EdV* p. 91. We may add that Bücher's concept of the 'integrated household economy' shows some similarities to Weber's 'ideal-type', but the fundamental differences between them shall be elucidated under Part III.

<sup>34</sup> See Friedrich List's '*Das National System der Politischen Ökonomie*' (1841) cited in Bürgin (1993) p. 68 n112.

<sup>35</sup> See Karl Rodbertus, '*Untersuchungen auf dem Gebiete der Nationalökonomie des Klassischen Altertums*' in *JfNS* 9 (1868) p. 339 ff. cit. in Bürgin (1993) p. 68 f. n 113.

<sup>36</sup> See Gustav Schmoller '*Grundriß der allgemeinen Volkswirtschaftslehre* vol. 2 (Leipzig 1904) p 666 ff..

<sup>37</sup> Bürgin (1993) p. 68 f.

writing a history of the economy. Whether this theory of economic stages can give a plausible account of the course of economic development or whether it is still caught up in economic history shall become clearer after we have discussed Bücher's account of the '*geschlossene Hauswirtschaft*' ('closed or integrated household economy') in more detail. Nevertheless, the title of his essay and his famous essay collection 'The Emergence of the National Economy' seems to indicate that we are dealing with a work in the field of economic history rather than economic theory.

### iii. 'Geschlossene Hauswirtschaft'

Bücher arrived at his classification of antiquity as a '*geschlossene Hauswirtschaft*' from Karl Rodbertus' premise that the ancient economy was based on the *oikos* and that this institution remained economically predominant throughout antiquity and even until the early middle ages.<sup>38</sup> By doing so, Bücher focused in particular on the purpose of production and consumption as the key or criterion for his theory of the economic stages. According to Bücher the 'oikos economy' is characterised by 'production for personal use' ('*Eigenproduktion*'), whereas in the 'city economy' 'production on demand' ('*Kundenproduktion*') was dominant. Bücher stressed that only the 'national economy' can be associated with 'commodity production' ('*Warenproduktion*').<sup>39</sup> Bücher emphasises that the 'integrated household economy' is characterised by the fact that production and consumption take place within the same household (or family). Unlike the modern economy, the level of production is not determined by a market demand but solely determined by the need of the members in the household. This applies to the supply of raw material too, which is collected by the different members of the household rather than provided or sold by a third party. Regarding the circulation of produce, it never gains the status of a commodity (*Ware*) because it is never exchanged on a market. The produce remains with the producers until it is consumed by them. 'The sphere of production (*Erwerbswirtschaft*) and household are not separable'.<sup>40</sup>

However, how can Bücher explain that certain households are much better off than others are, if exchange is solely confined to the *oikos* and the village community? According to Bücher, the success of a particular household driven community does not only depend on the skills of its members, but also on the fertility of the soil. A third precondition for running of a prosperous household is, for Bücher, that producer and landowner are one and the same. In other words, the ownership of land is the precondition of being able to plan and improve the results of their labour; it gives the household security and integrity. Furthermore, in order to satisfy Bücher's definition of the 'integrated household economy', all sorts of tools and devices have to be produced by the household

<sup>38</sup> Rodbertus' and Bücher's position are often seen as identical, which can of course only be attributed to their shared views on the character and extent of the ancient economy as dominated by the household. See Salin (1967) p. 16.

<sup>39</sup> *EdV* p. 87.

<sup>40</sup> *EdV* p. 92.

on its own too, an act which demanded an enormous variety of skills of which the ‘cultured man’ of modern times has hardly any knowledge or appreciation’.<sup>41</sup> This seems to be quite a sarcastic remark against the ‘modernisers’. Like them, Bücher was aware of the cultural sophistication and material splendour of the ancient cities. But, unlike his opponents, he did not conclude that the wealth of the ancient city originated in commerce and commodity exchange. Bücher explains the increases in the level satisfaction of household’s member’s needs as being due to the distribution of tasks and produce according to age, sex and ability amongst them. Although an expansion in the division of tasks and a certain specialisation in craftsmanship is an undisputed fact in the development of the household economy, an increase in the ‘collective effort’ was also an important contributing factor in satisfying the growing material needs and wants of the community. The ‘closed household economy’ is therefore not only characterised by a certain division of manual labour within the *oikos*, but also by the ‘*Arbeitsgemeinschaft*’ (working community) of its members.<sup>42</sup>

Bücher does not only attribute the ‘integrated household economy’ to pre-modern village and clan communities of the ‘grey past’, he also claims that many communities in parts of Russia, Korea or Africa were still (in Bücher’s times) very much incorporated in a system of an ‘integrated household economy’. Although production during later stages of the household economy involved exchange of produce amongst the wider community (one may think perhaps of neighbours, for example), the unification of the work effort between households was mostly temporary or took place as a result of marriage or inheritance.<sup>43</sup>

As we can see, Bücher does not only use evidence from fragments to support his claims, but seems to employ a comparative method of historical explanation too, which despite all its merits in accounting for the differences in the rationality of human interaction, assesses ancient social life alongside a modern concept of need for the tribal peoples. Bücher then makes the very error of which he accuses his opponents.

In basing his theory on Rodbertus’ position, Bücher pointed out that through the affiliation of strangers and enslavement of people in the Greek and Roman antiquity ‘the house is not only a place of living, but means also the co-operative working group (οικεταί)’.<sup>44</sup> Bücher argued that despite the fact that with the emergence of mass slavery the size and organisation of the household changed considerably, products were almost entirely

<sup>41</sup> *EdV* p. 93.

<sup>42</sup> *EdV* p. 94.

<sup>43</sup> A consideration of compensatory justice in distribution does not seem to come into play in Bücher.

<sup>44</sup> *EdV* p. 99.

still produced for domestic use. However, the *pater familias* became the power who not only governed and ruled over the distribution of produce, but also decided over the life and death of the household members. Due to the concentration of all power in the hands of the *pater familias* the household experiences a much stronger economic power. ‘All individual existence has disappeared; state and law are only separated by families; they [state and law] regulate the relationship between house and house, but not between men and men’.<sup>45</sup> Bücher points out that ‘from the economic autonomy of the slave-owning *oikos* originates the whole social history and a large part of the political history of ancient Rome’.<sup>46</sup> The emergence of social tensions and change are explained with the following statement: ‘If now a richer household forces a less wealthy owner off his house and farm, then he makes him a proletarian’<sup>47</sup> - a person free of land and free of any means of production. The absence of business capital and the absence of wage labour and any kind of industry consequently forces land-free people into slavery, as it constitutes the only means of survival. They become, according to Bücher, craftsmen-slaves (*Handwerkssklaven*). The emergence of large-scale households kept the buying and selling of items at the local market place as an occasional measure. Bücher points out that the high degree of self-sufficiency of the large estates was only possible due to the sophisticated degree of specialisation of those craftsmen slaves.<sup>48</sup> At this point however, Bücher cannot resist comparing this high level of specialisation and the variety of produce under ‘one roof’ in the ‘giant households’ with the multitudinous shops of a modern city. The concentration of human capital indicates to Bücher an increase in the owner’s assets, ‘which can only be compared with the giant capital gains of the modern millionaires’.<sup>49</sup> Another reason for the predominant self-sufficiency of the large estates, according to Bücher, was the ethos of the Romans in being proud to be able to produce all that is needed and wanted by them.<sup>50</sup>

Bücher undoubtedly paints a very detailed picture about the organisation of the household in ancient Rome, which we do not need to reproduce in every aspect. It is important simply to highlight that in Bücher’s account the numerous varieties of skills exercised, the work carried out and people living together did not change the character of the ancient economy qualitatively. Even though the landlord accumulated and acquired the

<sup>45</sup> *EdV*.p. 99.

<sup>46</sup> *EdV* p. 99.

<sup>47</sup> *EdV* p. 99.

<sup>48</sup> See *EdV* p. 100 n7 Bücher’s example is Poma’s *Tit Popmae Phrysi de operis servorum liber* of 1672

<sup>49</sup> *EdV* p. 101.

<sup>50</sup> See *EdV* p. 102-103 f., *EdV* p. 111.

produce of the farmers, and left them often with only the very basics, this produce was usually only consumption goods and intended for direct use. Bücher points out that over a very long period of time especially in feudalism, the trade of luxury goods was rare. Unfortunately, Bücher never clarifies what the farmers can expect by this 'certain service in return'. Secondly, rarity and the scope of commercial trade is not clearly defined by Bücher.

Bücher further maintained that even during the early middle ages the household based economy remained largely intact, as the predominant form of economic organisation. The main difference between ancient Rome and feudalism consisted for Bücher in the fact that apparently under the latter system the clod farmer, for example, was able to keep a *certain* kind of 'economic' independence from the feudal lord. Whereas in Rome a farmer who was forced off his land was not any longer able to pay his taxes or to duties to the state, which led Bücher to conclude that 'the economic progress in antiquity was bought at the expense of the 'proletarianisation' of the 'landless farmers' and craftsmen'.<sup>51</sup>

Bücher points out that after the demise of the large Roman estates, the early feudal system did not replace the household economy. We should consider that at that time several villages created a large 'economic' organism. This maintained the ancient purpose of production, which was to satisfy the material needs of the community. This goal is still predominant in the feudal village economies of the early middle ages, which function internally and externally like a single enlarged household of antiquity and is therefore still regarded by Bücher as an 'integrated' or 'closed' system. 'Only the city states saw an industrious market intercourse in foods'.<sup>52</sup> We see from this that Bücher never denied that produce was interchanged inside the boundaries of the community, but emphasised that the 'small household economy' developed only quantitatively (in its size, degree of planning and level of organisation). Its self-sufficient character and autonomy remained an essential characteristic throughout antiquity and a long period of the middle ages. Lending and borrowing of food and tools works on the basis of solidarity and reciprocity.<sup>53</sup> Trade hit the 'integrated household economy' only on the surface. In other words, Bücher is willing to admit the existence of trade and the planned export of goods for sale beyond luxury items. But such appearances 'do not touch the inner structure of economic life. The household

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<sup>51</sup> *EdV* p. 114.

<sup>52</sup> *EdV* p. 113.

<sup>53</sup> See *EdV* p. 109.

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economy still receives its impulse and direction from its own needs'.<sup>54</sup> Hence, Bücher clearly does not exclude a possible existence of trade or moneymaking, but simply characterises it as negligible in the overall inner structure of the ancient economy. This is to say that in comparison to the modern economic system of capitalism, where trade is the most characteristic and the most powerful force, ancient social and 'economic' life remained fundamentally rural and self-sufficient.

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<sup>54</sup> *EdV* p. 111.

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*iv. Exchange and Money*

Linked to Bücher's notion of the 'oikos economy' is a distinct definition of the role of exchange and money in antiquity and the early middle ages. Although it can be said that the latter role of money received a rather brief treatment by the author. Bücher's notion of exchange forms an argument against the well-established 'Prussian School' of political history.<sup>55</sup> According to Bücher, these scholars claimed that exchange and circulation of commodities constituted a permanent feature or characteristic of almost every stage of human economic life and accused them of metamorphosing this assumption into an attribute of human nature far too uncritically and swiftly. In other words, they presumed that exchange is an essential component of human nature. Bücher asserted that such an attribution is problematic. Bücher argued in opposition to them that in the light of Smith's and Ricardo's value theories, exchange is only a result of an increasing division of labour.<sup>56</sup> Only the latter form of division of labour is held to be natural, Bücher added without explaining why and concluded from this that 'exchange' (*Tausch*) is hence not a result of some sort of natural inclination by humans towards it, but that it is rather a result from a qualitatively increased division of labour. In antiquity, beyond and outside the household existed only 'temporary labour sharing communities' or a mutual temporary lending and borrowing of tools in cases of personal misfortune.<sup>57</sup> This is not an economy in which 'the economic agent does not produce what he needs for himself, rather what [in his opinion] is needed by other agents'. In other words, 'the collaboration of many, or everyone is needed in order to satisfy the needs of one'.<sup>58</sup> The latter part of this phrase constitutes possibly a meaningful definition of the 'national economy' (*Volkswirtschaft*). However, the problem concerning the above argument is whether or not we can apply this definition to all periods of human civilisation in general and to antiquity in particular. Bücher, by following Smith at this occasion, argued that the 'exchange economy' (*Verkehrswirtschaft*) was a very recent phenomenon and that mankind had lived and worked for thousands of years without exchange in its modern use of this term, but under forms of bartering products - a form which never involved production for export as in the 'national economy'. Bücher suggests instead that exchange is not natural to men. It is not

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<sup>55</sup> For a detailed discussion of this tradition see Part II.1 and II.2.ii.

<sup>56</sup> See Bürgin (1993) p. 388 f.

<sup>57</sup> *EdV* p. 97.

permanently desired by civilisations. By using a weak etymological argument to support his claim, Bücher emphasises that '*Tausch*' and '*täuschen*' (exchange and cheating) have one and the same root in the old German language. In order to strengthen his point, Bücher adds that often when deals and contacts were made, at least a third person had to witness the deal, and illustrates that often afterwards one would be kept preoccupied by the possibility of having been cheated. Bücher noted that exchange among people had to be always characterised by mutuality. 'Not without any reason did Roman public law prescribe five witnesses for each deal that was taking place on a market place', Bücher stresses.<sup>59</sup> The very rigid formalities concerning deals with outsiders and amongst citizens, not only in ancient Rome but also throughout antiquity, should give us enough reason to cast some doubt upon an antiquity of flourishing trade and commercial exchange, which the modern world knows. However, Bücher was only able to point out that ancient governments kept a close eye on what 'modernisers' may wish to call 'commerce' and that there was general awareness of the likely negative moral and political consequences of exchange for profit. Yet this does not constitute a sufficient argument to eliminate the possibility of a state controlled market economy.<sup>60</sup> This weakness does not ease off with Bücher's claim that people generally do not like to give away the products of their own labour, since they would belong naturally to the producer.<sup>61</sup> Bücher simply replaces one presupposition about human nature with another, which looks equally arbitrary. Bücher concludes from this and the previous argument that nowhere during the stage of the 'integrated household economy' did a 'dissected exchange take place'.<sup>62</sup> This is a puzzling result. Did the ancients not use coinage, minting and standardised measures and scales in order to evaluate money and commodities brought into the *polis*? Is the existence of permanent local market places not itself proof enough to all sceptics that exchange of produce reached a highly sophisticated level and is therefore in principal very much like ours?

Aimed against this critique, Bücher stressed that the function of money and measures are not introduced in order to engage into commercial exchange with other communities or outsider parties, but in order to fix general standards for paying due fines

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<sup>58</sup> *EdV* p. 89.

<sup>59</sup> See *EdV* p. 113

<sup>60</sup> See Pöhlmann (1913) p. 89 f.

<sup>61</sup> See *EdV* p. 96 f.

<sup>62</sup> *EdV* p. 97.

or tributes.<sup>63</sup> Money in antiquity, Bücher highlights, was not simply a medium of exchange but also a means to pay tributes, fees, fines, gifts, taxes and compensations, etc. The introduction and circulation of coinage was primarily intended to improve bartering with produce inside a community but never intended to engage in trade with other city-states. As long as the paying farmers can expect a certain service in return for their tributes, Bücher believes that the ‘integrated household economy’, maturing in size and in degree of organisation as antiquity progressed, did not have specific prices, interest rates, wages or rent. Bücher adds that ‘buying and selling, leasehold and rent could not have been daily affairs’.<sup>64</sup> On the contrary, he points out that ‘one should not get confused about the apparent opulent use of money...in early historic periods. Money is not only a ‘means of exchange’ (*Tauschmittel*), but also a ‘measure of value’ (*Wertmaß*), a ‘means of pay’ (*Zahlungsmittel*) and ‘means of custody’ (*Mittel der Wertaufbewahrung*). The latter purpose of money is the predominant one in antiquity. Because large quantities of payments, besides taxes and gifts, are originally rendered in the form of household produce (corn, meat, slaves, etc.)<sup>65</sup> ‘income and assets constitute a non-distinguishable unit (*Masse*) meaning non-separable’.<sup>66</sup> The canonical ban on interest rates is not, therefore, for Bücher an arbitrary moral-theological act, but was rather economically necessitated in order to maintain the closed household economy. The Roman asset tax (*tributum civium*) was not introduced to restrict the profits of the landlord, but rather to finance public needs (ships, wars, celebrations etc.). Loans amongst households may have taken place, but they were usually interest-free and served consumption purposes and should thus be understood as ‘friendly loans’. Capital loans are not system-compatible. As soon as interest rates enter the social sphere, it appears as unnatural and, as known from the Greek and Roman history, entails the perdition of the debtor’.<sup>67</sup>

The use of money and the exchange of produce are neither explicitly denied by Bücher, but they all take place in order to acquire those goods, which the single person or household was occasionally unable to produce by themselves or within their community. Even if money was a common feature of ‘economic life’ in the ‘integrated household economies’, in Bücher’s opinion, people were very suspicious about using it beyond a

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<sup>63</sup> *EdV* pp 107-108 f.

<sup>64</sup> *EdV* p. 113.

<sup>65</sup> See *EdV* pp. 112, 115.

<sup>66</sup> *EdV* p. 115.

<sup>67</sup> *EdV* p. 115.

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means of exchange.

After a detailed description of the character and the developments inside the household, Bücher comes to the conclusion that the self-sufficient economic structure of the household, which primarily aims for the satisfaction of its own needs, is of an entirely different character from the modern 'national economies'. This is mainly due to the fact that a 'national economy' with multinational trade links and commercial export did at no occasion emerge in antiquity. There was no division of labour on a national scale, wage labour, businesses; neither were there commodities nor a circulation of them.<sup>68</sup> However, whether this is a good argument to defy the possible claim that the ancient economy only differed quantitatively from the modern international economies of the late 19<sup>th</sup> century shall be investigated in the next chapter.

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<sup>68</sup> See *EdV* p. 115.

### v. *Critique*

As we have seen, Bücher clearly argued that the character of exchange and the nature of production in antiquity were dominated by the *oikos*. His statement that ‘exchange was initially totally unknown’<sup>69</sup> to mankind is not to say that Bücher categorically denied the existence of exchange, but claimed that its purpose is radically different from the way exchange operates in the ‘*Volkswirtschaft*’. The *oikos* orientation of antiquity is then not to be understood as a mere reality, but as a theoretical abstraction or reduction in order to formulate a general characterisation of the ancient economy. The *oikos* type or mode of economy must therefore be seen as a meta-economical phenomenon, which dominated the material sphere of antiquity so fundamentally and transparently that even certain elements, which are economically influential in the modern economy, could only penetrate the household structure of antiquity on its very surface. If our interpretation of Bücher’s view is justified, then assertions like those by Aubin do not present Bücher’s position correctly: ‘The opinion...by Bücher, that there was necessarily a step-by-step development from the territorial economy, through the national economy to the world economy, describes the process of the growing interregional integration incorrectly’.<sup>70</sup> As it is clear from the above remarks and to anyone who has read the *EdV*, Bücher does not use terms such as ‘world economy’ and ‘territorial economy’. Also economic development did not take place strictly in stages, according to Bücher. As Bücher describes it, the processes of transition may be relatively brief, but he clarifies that ‘the integrated household economy is transformed into the city economy during a process which lasted over hundreds of years’.<sup>71</sup> Bücher’s theory of modes or stages is a tool, which the economist can and should use in order to categorise the economic development (*‘wirtschaftliche Entwicklung’*). However, we may object that the use of such ‘stage theories of economic development’ to classify the economic life of antiquity are nevertheless themselves products of the empirical/positivist movement inside the German *Nationalökonomie* at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century and therefore *modernise* the ancient world by the dubious application of modern methods and concepts.

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<sup>69</sup> *EdV* p. 92.

<sup>70</sup> Aubin (1976) p. 222.

<sup>71</sup> *EdV* p.116. Even the transition from the ‘city economy’ to the modern ‘national economy’ spans centuries, from the end of the Middle Ages right into the creation of the nation-states of the late 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries. See *EdV* p. 135 f.

Another weakness in Bücher's theory is that although he can perhaps accommodate what may at first glance look like a contradiction regarding the extent of the existence of exchange, the problem of the significance of money and commerce still remains. For example, Bücher stated that 'exchange is an alien element to the integrated household economy'<sup>72</sup>, but as he had previously pointed out that exchange of goods existed and that coinage had purchasing power, he should have defined the insignificance of the commercial elements more accurately.

Also, throughout his essay, Bücher is unfortunately not free from employing modern social and economic concepts such as 'proletariat' and 'competition'<sup>73</sup>, these concepts are part of the modern economic vocabulary. It is even puzzling in the first place as to where the competing incentive between households would come from if those households worked entirely self-sufficiently. Regarding the Greek *polis* one may interject that one *polis* wanted to be more powerful or splendiferous than the other one. This would lead to an assumption that the ancient city-state operated like one *oikos*, an argument which Bücher does not entertain. The large estates of Rome may perhaps have competed against each other because of the greedy attitude of the *pater familias*, but Bücher did not introduce this possibility.

A further controversial point relates to Bücher's argument of men's 'natural aversion towards exchange'. 'Cheating' and 'exchange' have different roots in ancient Greece and Latin.<sup>74</sup> That they may have shared the same etymological root in Old German is irrelevant in respect of ancient Greece and Rome. Apart from this etymological misreading, Bücher's psychological speculations about our 'natural aversion' towards exchange is, to say the least, highly problematic. Using an empirical approach to characterise a certain part of human nature, based on some 'authenticated documents', immediately creates a burden of proof. Bücher did not supersede the conservative argument that exchange is natural to man; he simply stated an equally weak argument to counter it by saying that it is unnatural. As we saw, it is obvious that the nature of this argument is based upon mere speculation. Without knowing more about the anthropological determination of the human psyche, agency and the essence of the human society, we can never prove successfully what is natural, or unnatural, to us in an economic sense. Leaving aside the general question about the anthropological presuppositions about

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<sup>72</sup> *EdV* p. 113.

<sup>73</sup> *EdV* p. 114. Here we hear also of entrepreneurs and profit making.

human nature. A fruitful result of this discussion was that we clarified Bücher's notion of exchange and contrasted it against the naïve understanding held by his critics.<sup>75</sup>

Regarding Bücher's argument that antiquity and feudalism were lacking the main characteristics of the 'exchange economy', that is that every service demands a specific return in the form of money,<sup>76</sup> it is questionable whether the absence of such returns would not allow for commercial activity on a larger scale. Bücher's definition of money is insufficient here. The handing-over of slaves, certain luxury products or services could similarly be used as universal means of returns.

Admitting that commodity circulation, transport, and exchange of goods and services were a reality in feudalism, Bücher argued that those exchanges did not take place amongst independent business partners. This claim that the free interaction of economic units ('*Wirtschaftseinheiten*') is 'alien to antiquity and feudalism, which depend to some extent on one another and which interact on the basis of specific communal contracts'<sup>77</sup>, does not automatically create a separate economic realm for antiquity. First of all, the 'national economies' of the mid/late 19<sup>th</sup> century were also state controlled and commercial behaviour was sometimes heavily regulated (e.g. the economy of the Wilhelminian Germany). Secondly, the interaction of the large estates in the late Roman Empire was legislated and controlled by Roman law as it was in Bücher's time too. What antiquity and the early Middle Ages certainly did not have was an institutionalised economy on a national and international scale. This point was later added by Max Weber (see Part II).

Bücher's claim that 'during the regular course of the economy there were no commodities, no price, commodity circulation, no income distribution and accordingly no wages' etc.<sup>78</sup> has little argumentative strength. This appears to be a very ambiguous view, especially in respect of the 'regular course of the economy'. One may wonder, for how long and how significant were the 'irregular events' in ancient economic history?

According to Bücher's model, the mutual give and take ('*Austausch*') among the members of the community was mainly based on co-operation, but never on competition. However, his point that a 'farmer is not a good farmer, who has to buy what his own field could give him',<sup>79</sup> may give us a good insight into the ethos of the ancients, but does not

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<sup>74</sup> Lat. Exchange = muto. To deceive = decipio

<sup>75</sup> Humphreys (1978) p. 137, Austin-Vidal-Naquet (1977) p. 3 f. and Love (191) p. 34 f.

<sup>76</sup> *EdV* p. 116.

<sup>77</sup> *EdV* p. 116.

<sup>78</sup> *EdV* p. 114.

<sup>79</sup> *EdV* p. 111.

exclude the possibility of production by customers or export demand, as he is willing to admit for the ‘city economy’ of the later middle ages. After all, Bücher’s model lacks clarity about what according to the law and documentation was prohibited or encouraged and what the social and ‘economic’ reality was like in Aegina or Constantinople. However, one of the most common criticisms against Bücher, that he categorically denied any kind of exchange in antiquity, has clearly been proven not to be true and is therefore a very inaccurate reading of the *EdV* and the *ZGW*.<sup>80</sup>

Bücher was most widely criticised for his claim that antiquity never escaped the stage of the ‘*geschlossene Hauswirtschaft*’, but also admitted the existence of exchange. Besides the advantages of such a theoretical model, the major weakness in this account lies with the definition of the ‘household’ itself, which is far too wide. Bücher seems to assume only a quantitative difference between what are essentially different ‘economic’ units. Do the large-scale estates and the ancient city operate ‘economically’ and consequently socially in the very same way as a small rural household situated in the vicinity of the *polis*?<sup>81</sup> Bücher does not only face the problem that his definition of ‘production on demand’ (*Kundenproduktion*), which is the main characteristic for the ‘city economy’, takes place evidently in the ancient city and predominantly in the modern ‘national economy’ too. If ‘production on demand’ was a significant characteristic in the city-states, then we could assert that small-scale capitalism existed in these areas. However, Bücher’s categorical denial of the existence of flexible capital (in the form of wage labour) and export markets makes it difficult to argue that a national economy of the likes of the 17<sup>th</sup>/18<sup>th</sup> century could have flourished in ancient cities. However, the difference between the economies of the ancient city-state and the medieval city were not clearly drawn or discussed. These definitional weaknesses are sometimes overlooked in the contemporary assessment of Bücher’s work.<sup>82</sup> ‘Despite the plausibility of Bücher’s position concerning the agrarian dominance of the ancient empires in general, it seems doubtful, given the evidence of the time, that Bücher could successfully convince his audience that the ‘integrated household economy’ persisted throughout the entire period of

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<sup>80</sup> See *EdV* p. 114.

<sup>81</sup> It might be possible that Bücher misread Aristotle’s analogies between household and *polis*, but the analogy is, as Aristotle states it, not a parallel or an equating of the two. *Pol.* [1252b26]

<sup>82</sup> ‘Undoubtedly, the predominance of slave labour was in Bücher’s eyes the more important explanation of the stagnation of antiquity, but the contrast between the progressive medieval city and the ancient community was already clearly drawn’. [by Bücher} Morley (1996) p. 17

antiquity and for most of the middle ages.<sup>83</sup> Some of Bücher's contemporaries such Bluemner still regarded his position, despite this major error, as 'plausible'. Even if Bücher did not define the 'oikos economy' rigorously as an 'ideal-type', we clearly worked out on the grounds of his essay that the 'integrated household economy' is a theoretical abstraction and not a completely permanent feature of ancient social life.<sup>84</sup> Bücher does not regard Athens or Rome as closed or integrated households, but the production of items remained confined to the *oikos* or the *latifundium*. The problem remains, however, as to whether the entertainment of a theoretical model of economic stages in which the undoubtedly diverse character of ancient 'economic' life is brought under the concept of the 'integrated household economy' is indeed an adequate and justifiable theorisation.

Some other important questions also remain unrecognised by Bücher. For example, did the craftsman in the workshops of Athens produce his goods by customer orders? What kind of function and implications had the local *agora* for the life of the ancient citizens? To what extent did exchange play a part in the everyday life of the ancient communities? Even if the proportion of exchange was very minor indeed, as Bücher tells us, did it have perhaps a more significant cultural or social impact? Did, for example, the state-authorized transport of produce to other cities have any other function than to prevent famine or food shortages elsewhere? Bücher's failure or reluctance to address these crucial questions and to clear up some terminological confusions and light-hearted assumptions about human nature almost invites the polemic remarks and harsh criticism which it attracted from Meyer and his colleagues in ancient and political history; to which we shall turn to in the following chapters. Even though some of these criticisms are justified, they should not deflect from Bücher's achievements in developing 'a differentiated picture of ancient economy'<sup>85</sup>. He highlighted well before Hasebroek, Polanyi and Finley that exchange and trade played a much more insignificant role in antiquity than some *modernisers*, both today and in Bücher's time, would advocate. Bücher has successfully exposed the largely rural character of antiquity together with the purpose of production, predominantly for direct use by the members of the household or the estate. But he does not meet the methodological rigour, which he demanded so vigorously from his opponents

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<sup>83</sup> *EdV* p. 116. Bücher speak of development that lasts for centuries and aims not to associate the middle ages entirely with the 'city economy'

<sup>84</sup> Bücher does not use the term 'ideal-type' as Weber did later, but already attempted to define the ancient economy in its 'typical pure form' *EdV* p. 91.

<sup>85</sup> Schneider (1990) p. 422.

in ancient history and political economy either. However, with Schneider's claim that 'the sources of ancient economic history show in opposition [to Bücher] that 'economic' development existed already in Archaic times, of which the most important characteristics was demographic growth, urbanisation and an expansion of trade'<sup>86</sup>, then we seem to be back to square one in the debate. Bücher acknowledged the existence of an 'economic development', and we pointed out the ambiguity of these words in the English language already. However, it is on Schneider's side of little help to introduce concepts such as 'urbanisation' and 'expansion of trade'. As for these and other terms, they have no place in the preserved literature of the ancients. That Bücher developed a static model of the ancient economy or a stereotypical account of the 'economic' can only be said justifiably about the term 'integrated household economy', which Bücher was eager to keep as a valid theoretical description of the ancient economy. Its definition is by no means rigid, if not a little too loose. It seems that no event or political crisis, no war or slave uprising could shake the fundamental *oikos* character of antiquity and beyond. We must conclude that any change in the political conditions, no matter how fundamental, had at the same time an effect on cultural change, and had according to Bücher no fundamental effect on the 'economic' organisation of Hellas or Rome. The social and 'economic' effects of slavery for example has hardly any mention. He claims that 'the entire social and a good part of the political history of ancient Rome can be explained from the economic autonomy of the slave-owning household'.<sup>87</sup>

Finally, it is often asserted that Bücher's account of economic development is linked to a notion of 'economic evolution', which necessitates the emergence of the national economy. This problem together with some corrections that Bücher made to his own position after having been heavily criticised, shall be discussed in the end of this Part and in Part II.

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<sup>86</sup> Schneider (1990) p. 423.

<sup>87</sup> *EdV* p. 99.

## 2. Eduard Meyer - the Modern Face of Antiquity and the Proper Task of History

### i. *Biographical Note*<sup>88</sup>

Eduard Meyer (1855-1930) was born in Hamburg. He came from a lower middle class background. His father was a teacher, which allowed him to attend the well renowned *Johanninum Gymnasium* in Hamburg. Aged 24, he completed his postdoctoral thesis at Leipzig and chaired professorships at Breslau (Wrozwav), Halle and from 1902 was in Berlin where he was a professor of ancient history until his retirement in 1923. Besides his many journeys to the Meditterrean, he visited England, Scotland and in 1925 the Soviet Union. He was also a visiting professor at Chicago between 1909-10.

The *Geschichte des Altertums* (*GdA*) (first edition 1884-1907) was Meyer's most influential work and scholarly bequest to us, which gave him international prestige beyond the academic world of Germany.<sup>89</sup> The American academic community flattered him when they acclaimed his standing as 'the most eminent living historian in the American public'.<sup>90</sup> His scholarly reputation earned him seven honorary doctoral degrees most notably from Harvard and Oxford. In 1919 Meyer became rector-principal of the prestigious *Humboldt Universität* of Berlin.

Although Meyer enjoyed his work abroad and the pluralism of the European cultures, his political pamphlets during World War I and his anti-Anglo-Saxon attitude mixed with a lavish dose of anti-Semitism during the 1920s did not benefit his previously renowned reputation in the eyes of American, English and French scholars after his death. Meyer's patriotic nationalism should however not be confused with what occurred during the 1930s in Germany and elsewhere in Europe. During the World War and in particular during the years of economic and political hardship of the 1920s, Meyer headed and supported the '*Notgemeinschaft der Deutschen Wissenschaft*', an organisation which aimed

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<sup>88</sup> The following information was largely presented by Demandt (1990) p. 161 f. and Christ (1972) 286 ff. A very detailed portrait of Meyer's social background, education and early career steps can be found in Hoffmann (1990) pp. 208-254. and in 'Eduard Meyer - Zu Zeit und Werk' (1991)

<sup>89</sup> Unte (1990) p. 505 f.

<sup>90</sup> Demandt (1990) p. 161.

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to continue scientific research and provide higher education during a period of political and economic instability and chaos, which consequently led to desolate conditions at the once proud German universities.<sup>91</sup>

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<sup>91</sup> Unte (1990) pp. 505-537. The author highlights also an interesting aspect of the German economic and intellectual situation during the 1920s.

## ii. *Ancient History vs. Economic Theory*

Bücher's thesis of the *oikos* character of antiquity and of the early middle ages together with his theory of economic stages with which he challenged the method of the established historiography, were regarded as highly provocative by scholars of ancient history. However, the treatment of Bücher's arguments did not take place solely on the basis of a factual dispute, but were discussed in a polemic fashion right from their very occurrence.<sup>92</sup> Although ignorance and a little dose of scholarly snobbishness were more deeply rooted on Meyer's side, Bücher and his followers were themselves not free from comments against the 'outdated' and 'conservative' methods in historiography. This created additional misunderstanding and hampered a compromise between the contrary positions. However, before we analyse those reasons, which left the Bücher-Meyer Controversy until the present without a satisfactory solution, we may first look at Eduard Meyer's counter arguments against Bücher's thesis.

Meyer expressed his opposition to Bücher's position in a paper, which he gave at the 3<sup>rd</sup> Conference of German Historians in Frankfurt in 1895.<sup>93</sup> Entitled 'The Economic Development of Antiquity' (*Die Wirtschaftliche Entwicklung des Altertums*), his essay intended 'to talk about a subject field of a general interest, which would clearly be of importance for today'.<sup>94</sup> According to Meyer's judgement the subject of the 'economic development of antiquity' was of obvious importance. Amongst those theories was Karl Rodbertus' 'oikos theory', which Meyer deemed as 'widespread' especially amongst economists.<sup>95</sup> 'The position of those outstanding scholars', he remarks a little ironically, 'in support of this theory are however erroneous and yet, I believe, this theory stands hampering in the way of the proper understanding of antiquity in particular, but also of

<sup>92</sup> See Mazza (1985) p. 508

<sup>93</sup> Schneider (1990). The author emphasised first in brief the situation in the historical studies, before he turned to Meyer's arguments against Bücher. We shall analyse both sides of the argument first before analysing the intellectual background of the controversy in Part II.

<sup>94</sup> *WEaA* p. 81. The essay was first published in *JfNS* 9 (1895) and was reprinted in Finley (1979) The original page numbers are kept in the Finley collection. The essay is abbreviated as *WEaA*, The edition used here is reprinted in Meyer, *Kleine Schriften* 1 (1924). We shall also use his additional remarks in Meyer's essay on 'Slavery in Antiquity' (*Die Sklaverei im Altertum*) (*SA*) in Meyer (1924) 1 pp. 169-212, since both papers complements to Meyer's position about the character of the 'economic' development of antiquity. See Schneider (1990) p. 431. From letters by M. I. Rostovtzeff and Georg von Below to Eduard Meyer it becomes apparent that Meyer planned an encyclopaedia of ancient economic history. See 'Eduard Meyer - Zu Zeit und Werk' (1991) p. 17 f.

<sup>95</sup> *WEaA* p. 81.

world historical development in general'.<sup>96</sup> Meyer argued that Rodbertus' theory, which defined 'the ancient economy as an *oikos* economy,...contradicted all that we know about the state of affairs in antiquity' and is therefore hardly supported in the 'classics' ('*Altertumswissenschaft*').<sup>97</sup>

However, from where did this 'widespread support' for the 'oikos economy' come? According to Meyer, its 'almost dominant' influence was present amongst the '*Nationalökonomie*' and freshly restated with Bücher's paper *Die Entstehung der Volkswirtschaft*, which should become the main target of Meyer's counterattack in the *WEdA*.

We do not need to repeat Meyer's sketchy elucidation of Bücher's 'theory of economic stages'. However, although the selected detail of Bücher's arguments is displayed correctly in the *WEdA*, it must be conspicuous to everyone who read the *EdV* carefully, that Meyer's interpretation is focused on those passages which suggest that Bücher regarded the ancient economy as having experienced no exchange, mere production for personal consumption within the household and that the entire circle of production and consumption was inextricably linked and confined to the household.<sup>98</sup> Besides Meyer's simplification of Bücher's position, he asserted that rudiments of the 'city economy' in antiquity are admitted by Bücher, but points out correctly with regard to Bücher position that any beginnings of a 'national economy' are not visible until the 15<sup>th</sup> and 16<sup>th</sup> century. In his own words, Meyer describes Bücher's stance as 'that an established economic structure with a richly developed transport system and a lively exchange of goods amongst the entire population, institutionalised trade and a cast of traders as procurers between production and consumption are plainly denied' by the latter.<sup>99</sup> Although Meyer does not deny the autonomous character of the *oikos* and its development into the large estate, the permanent presence of autarchic and self-sufficient households, which excludes the possibility of wage labour on a significant scale, are strongly challenged.<sup>100</sup> Meyer is also

<sup>96</sup> *WEdA* p. 81.

<sup>97</sup> *WEdA* p. 81. Meyer refers here an elsewhere mainly to Rodbertus' article '*Die Geschichte der Römischen Tributsteuern*' ('The History of the Roman Tribute Taxes') *JfNS* vol. 4 (1865), See also Rodbertus thesis in *JfNS* 9 (1968) 339 ff.

<sup>98</sup> See *WEdA* p. 82 ff.

<sup>99</sup> *WEdA* p. 82-83.

<sup>100</sup> In order to support this point, Meyer refers for the very first time to Weber's post-doctoral thesis *Die Römische Agrargeschichte*. Meyer supported Weber's point that the phenomenon of the 'closed household economy' was temporary and did not exist throughout the entire *Roman Empire*. See *WEdA* p. 83 n3. Note too that Meyer clearly acknowledges a village and household basis of the 'economy' of the primitive tribes. *GdA* vol. I.1. p. 63 f.

concerned with the term ‘autonomous household’ (*‘Autarkie des Haushaltes’*) introduced by Rodbertus and re-employed by Bücher. Meyer used Aristotle’s apparent claim that the *‘autarki’* may apply to the *polis* but not strictly to the *oikos*.<sup>101</sup> For Meyer, Bücher’s ‘integrated household economy’ takes ‘the character of a utopia...a kind of ‘isolated state’<sup>102</sup>, which does not seem to take the diversity between ancient cities and during different historical periods sufficiently into account. Although Meyer granted Bücher that in antiquity farmers did indeed follow the wisdom ‘that this one is a useless farmer, who has to buy what his own farm can provide him with’<sup>103</sup>, as Meyer added, this wisdom does not constitute a peculiarity to antiquity only and supports therefore Varo’s utterances, who demanded that ‘the farmer shall rather sell and not buy’.<sup>104</sup> The absence, or as occasionally qualified by Meyer<sup>105</sup>, the complete unimportance of institutionalised trade, wage labour, exchange and independent craftsmen throughout the entire antiquity, were however not the only assertions against Bücher and his followers.<sup>106</sup>

We saw earlier that Bücher aimed at a clear separation of his model of the ‘emergence of the national economy’ from the method and periods which the ‘historian divides his stuff in’.<sup>107</sup> Meyer was made aware of this argument through Werner Sombart’s theoretical attacks on Georg von Below, historian at Leipzig, at the 5<sup>th</sup> ‘Conference of German Historians’ at Heidelberg in 1903.<sup>108</sup> We recall that Bücher saw his own presupposition of the ‘closed household economy’ in antiquity as a paradigm of economic theory, not economic history or a complete picture of reality.<sup>109</sup> To speak in Sombart’s terms, such paradigms are designed to understand ‘our modern economic life’, and therefore, ‘how the real circumstances were in the middle ages is not of interest to them’, adds Meyer.<sup>110</sup> Bücher’s theory of ‘economic stages’ aims indeed at an explanation of how the modern *‘Volkswirtschaft’* developed ‘genetically’ from the past and not how life in

<sup>101</sup> *WEa* p. 88.

<sup>102</sup> *WEa* p. 87 n4.

<sup>103</sup> *WEa* p. 85.

<sup>104</sup> *WEa* p. 85.

<sup>105</sup> *WEa* p. 84 f.

<sup>106</sup> What also added fuel to Meyer’s assertions was the point that Bücher, in his 2<sup>nd</sup> edition of the *EdV* left out the phrase that ‘closed household economy’ was predominant from the beginning of human culture to the beginning of the second millennium AD. From the third edition onwards, the line is drawn more vaguely with the ‘early Middle Ages’ See *EdV* (1893) p. 116.

<sup>107</sup> See *EdV* pp. 87-88.

<sup>108</sup> See Sombart (1902) *WEa* p. 85 n4 ff. See also the newspaper comments about the Historian Conferences in Schumann (1974)

<sup>109</sup> *WEa* p. 85 n4

<sup>110</sup> See Sombart (1902).

antiquity or during Middle Ages really was.<sup>111</sup> The problem for Meyer here is that these models do not simply remain theory, but as we saw earlier, they employ specific historic and political facts.<sup>112</sup> They use non-economic (theoretical) vocabulary and interpret these terms in a fashion to suit and justify the theory of ‘economic development’ in stages or steps. In other words, they aim to show how the modern economy developed from the ‘city economy’ and the ‘city economy’ from the ‘integrated household economy’. In order to achieve this goal, Bücher thought it was legitimate to abstract from anything accidental or irregular in order to focus solely on what was the normal or ‘regular course of the economy’.<sup>113</sup>

Meyer’s criticism is fully justified if we set aside the pervasive polemic tone. Indeed Bücher did not discuss the problems surrounding such a theoretical approach sufficiently. For example, how significant are such irregular or accidental events for the characterisation of the ancient economy that do not fit the paradigm of the ‘integrated household economy’. If all ‘economic’ (*volkswirtschaftlichen*) phenomena are at the same time historical and cultural phenomena too,<sup>114</sup> then Bücher is clearly not developing economic theories but is theorising over human history. If the paradigm of the ‘*Oikowirtschaft*’ would hold true and if indeed all ‘economic’ phenomena are at the same time cultural and historical, then it would follow that because of the absence of a ‘*Volkswirtschaft*’, any form of production and labour carried out under the ‘roof’ of the household, small or large, would not have had any impact on the shaping of any historical event or any cultural impact in antiquity at all. If we now connect his aim to show historians how the ‘*Volkswirtschaft*’ really emerged, then we can understand perhaps Meyer’s furious reaction over the hidden universality claim in Bücher’s method over ancient history and not just economic theory. Bücher would have to admit that in fact he does not remain merely theoretical with the content of the *EdV*, but that he clearly entered the field of historical investigation. Otherwise his theory would remain merely a theory for its own sake and would not explain any phenomena at all.

The polemical and furious responses by the established guild of German ancient historians, especially those matching the standing and academic influence of Meyer, Georg von Below for example, had in general little sympathy for such intrusions into historical

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<sup>111</sup> See *EdV* p. 86.

<sup>112</sup> See *EdV* p. 98 ff.

<sup>113</sup> See *EdV* p. 114.

<sup>114</sup> *EdV* p. 86.

studies stemming from those ‘far higher ideas of the *Nationalökonomie*’.<sup>115</sup> Meyer’s cynical remarks become understandable in the light of the fact that during and shortly after Bücher’s provocative *EdV*, ‘*Volkswirtschaftlehre*’ (the science of the national economy) was at that time in Germany still struggling to gain a distinctive methodological and historical foundation and to establish itself with an acceptable scientific basis.<sup>116</sup>

Further, Meyer asserted against liberal minded scholars such as Bücher that they were ‘obsessed by the aspiration to degrade the power and the importance of the state in practice and theory. Instead they intend to highlight the individual rights to freedom of movement and the importance of those organisation which were not founded by the state’.<sup>117</sup>

We also noted above that Bücher regretted that the first edition of the *EdV* in 1893 was a rushed piece of work. However, in the nine editions of the *EdV*, which were yet to follow, Bücher was only prepared to make very few modifications and amendments to his original thesis. These small alterations could not move Meyer at all to change his unfavourable judgement about Bücher’s position.<sup>118</sup> On the contrary, the ‘absurdity’ of Bücher’s stance made it unnecessary for Meyer to take notice of any other later papers, in which Bücher aimed to clarify his theory to some degree.<sup>119</sup> Whether Meyer was correct in remaining ignorant towards Bücher shall be assessed in the final chapter of this part. Also any personal correspondence, however unlikely, between Bücher and Meyer, which could have cleared up some misunderstandings and perhaps opened up a dialogue in order to find a solution to the controversy, did not, as far as we are aware, take place. Besides the theoretical differences between the two scholars, there seems to exist an ideological divide between them, which went beyond the question of the nature of the ancient economy and any personal animosities. However, before we assess the possibility that these two positions were fostered in different political camps, we may sketch out first Meyer’s counter position on the character of economic development in antiquity.

<sup>115</sup> See the polemic remarks by Meyer in *WEdA* p. 85 n4 f. and the criticisms by Meyer’s pupil Gummerus (1906) and Parvan (1909) cited *WEdA* p. 88 n1.

<sup>116</sup> The situation in political economy, historical studies and in classics is assessed in Part II.2-3.

<sup>117</sup> *GdA* vol. I.1. p. 16.

<sup>118</sup> Finey (1979) respective in Meyer (1924).

<sup>119</sup> See Part I.1 and I.6.

### iii. *The Early Modern Character of the Economy of Classical Greece*

Meyer suggests instead of a linear and steady progressing economic development from the *oikos* to the ‘*Volkswirtschaft*’ à la Bücher, that each period civilisation, for example antiquity, lives through a stages of slavery, feudalism and capitalism. He argues that ‘the first epoch of antiquity, the Homeric period...stands in one line with the epoch of the Christian-Germanic nations and deserves to be regarded as the middle ages’.<sup>120</sup> The classical or aristocratic period of ancient Greece correlates the ‘early modern’ period.<sup>121</sup> Consequently, this meant for Meyer that slavery did not dominate the productive life in the classical period. Instead flexible capital in the form of wage labour and private property dominated, which makes classical antiquity economically comparable with the early ages of modern capitalism. Finally, the dramatic decline of the Roman Empire and a fallback into barbarism shows to Meyer that the ‘economic development’ of antiquity goes through a circle of rise, prosperity and decline and is not steadily progressing from the lower to the more sophisticated, as Bücher has maintained. This also forms the conclusion of Meyer’s essay on ancient slavery (SA): ‘Hence the circle is closed. The development returns to that point where it started from; the medieval world order forms its rule for a second time’.<sup>122</sup>

At this point we could perhaps suspect that Bücher’s and Meyer’s views on the *oikos* character of early antiquity and the early Middle Ages are very similar. Meyer indeed does believe that antiquity in Homer’s and Hesiod’s times (ca. 750-700) was dominated by household production. However, unlike Bücher, Meyer does not exclude the possibility of trade (*Handel*), which may have existed even prior to this period.<sup>123</sup> Although Meyer admits that in the early period of human civilisation a much smaller volume of trade existed, he nevertheless strongly ‘suspected’ that already ‘even under very primitive circumstances trade, the exchange of foreign commodities for one’s own produce, played a very big role’. In any case it is clear that, for all peoples who are considered in history, trade is one of the most influential factors in cultural development’.<sup>124</sup> Meyer regards a sample of rare documentation of the ancient Orient and Babylon, Saba and ancient Egypt as

<sup>120</sup> SA p. 188

<sup>121</sup> See Brockmeyer (1979) p. 18 ff.

<sup>122</sup> SA p. 212

<sup>123</sup> WEa p. 90. The term ‘*Handel*’ is used in the sense of the ‘swapping of own products for foreign commodities’. It is not the use of the word *Handel*, which is problematic here, but its application to ‘commodity’ exchange in the barter ‘economy’.

<sup>124</sup> WEa p. 90.

sufficient evidence in order to illustrate the highly developed character of ancient 'economic life' as early as the 3<sup>rd</sup> millennium.<sup>125</sup> We hear of the Phoenicians that they have dominated the whole Mediterranean with their 'trade', the 'exchange of precious metal', 'selling and buying of farms and houses, 'loans' (with interest rates of up to 17 - 20 % APR), 'rented labour and houses', 'inheritances' and so on.<sup>126</sup> According to Meyer, the evidence for this is to be found in the monuments and documents, which apparently provide us with the certainty that the whole area of the Syrian-Arabic desert was 'evidently' a network for trade with the cities constituting its centres that were holding the 'industry'. Even in self-sufficient ancient Egypt of the second dynasty money played an important role. How important exchange and money really were, and what social impact they may have had, is unfortunately not clearly analysed by Meyer.

When reading Meyer's *WEa* it is difficult to resist the thought that Meyer was simply impressed by the grandeur of those early cities and the splendid quality of their produced artefacts. For many who know a little about the controversy itself, Meyer's picture of a buzzing economy in early antiquity described with modern economic concepts, this would perhaps be enough to conclude that Meyer had modernised antiquity irrespective of cultural and regional differences, but the matter is more complex. Meyer, like most ancient historians, had a strong enthusiasm for the legacy of antiquity and its complex, highly developed culture; religion, philosophy, the organisation of its states and so on. It is also difficult to see how the rise and fall of the great ancient cities and their cultures can leave anyone who has the slightest appreciation for the ancient world without fascination and amazement. It is also a common place for historians to fill in the gaps between historical evidence with speculation or conjecture. This was certainly the case for Meyer and many of his colleagues, as long as such speculations were not completely unfounded. The picture Meyer paints is most certainly a complex one, but not associated with modern capitalism, as Finley and Millett for example have argued.<sup>127</sup> However, both of the above arguments are obviously not convincing as they stand. Meyer argues that

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<sup>125</sup> See *WEa* p. 90 f.

<sup>126</sup> See *WEa* pp. 90-98.

<sup>127</sup> See Millett (1991) p. 10 The fine difference is that the modern economy, which Meyer used as an analogy to the economy of the classical period was no near a developed capitalist market economy of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Finley and Millett face the danger to suppose that Meyer's understanding of early modern capitalism can be modernised as if Meyer supposed economic structures of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. As we have seen, even for Bücher, the characteristic of the modern economy was its national character. Meyer added the importance of the state in the ancient and early modern economy. This latter aspect seems to diminish rapidly nowadays, which makes 20<sup>th</sup> century capitalism distinct from its previous forms. The question what makes an age capitalistic

despite the strong dominance of the barter economy, goods have been traded and metal has been coined. The difference between these different epochs lies rather in the political constitutions of the *polei*, the organisation of work and the impact of slavery on society. The pre-Homeric period is therefore much more suitable to be compared with well-developed feudalism instead of early modern capitalism, which has its parallel with the first millennium AD with its diverse forms of production and exchange. This is to say that although the household and the 'village economy' played a dominant part in the material supply of the community, trade and coining featured too. Although the trend towards urbanisation continued, villages shared a co-existence with the city and the former maintained their feudal power.<sup>128</sup> Homeric Greece (ca. 750 BC) is thus characterised by Meyer with 'small farms, tenants, day labourers and beggars'.<sup>129</sup> 'The large estates owned by the wealthy landlords employed numerous workers'.<sup>130</sup> Even though 'bought slave-labour rarely existed during this period', Meyer argued that due to an increase in the social rift between the classes, social tensions between the small farmers and the large estate owners were increasingly evident. This factor benefited the gradual rise in the number of recognised and distinct professions, which were emerging quickly mainly on the large estates in order to satisfy the ever-increasing demand for luxury goods of their aristocratic owners. With this ability to produce sophisticated pieces of art, weaponry, amphorae, etc., 'the 8<sup>th</sup> century BC, experienced an enormous boom in trade'.<sup>131</sup> More luxury goods and artefacts were available to satisfy the demands for these products elsewhere. Those precious 'treasures', which previously had to be often stolen or bought very dearly, could now be produced at home in even better quality. Hence, 'a flourishing sea trade begins, exporting commodities and importing raw-materials and the desperately needed corn'.<sup>132</sup>

We should note at this point that Meyer's argument rests on two premises, that of an ever increasing desire for luxury goods throughout antiquity and secondly the shortage of corn and home grown food in general, forcing the Greek cities into export. Proof of this is, for Meyer, that even the morally minded Homer had to admit that sea trade during that period played an important part in the regular acquisition of such agricultural produce. However, Meyer presents Homer's *Odyssey* in a way as if every ordinary citizen was

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shall be discussed again in Part III.

<sup>128</sup> *WEa* p. 101. See 'the autonomous economy of the single household is the predominant form of life'

<sup>129</sup> *WEa* p. 101.

<sup>130</sup> *WEa* p. 101.

<sup>131</sup> *WEa* p. 104.

<sup>132</sup> See *WEa* p. 104.

forced and able to sail over the dangerous oceans of the world in order to purchase food for his family and in return to sell any half-decent artefact that his family made over the cold winter months abroad. Unfortunately Meyer's audience is left in doubt again over the intensity and regularity of such commercial endeavours.<sup>133</sup> One can of course imagine that during a drought, people had to resort to sell any home-made artefacts to the city, which were then sold off for food purchases by the government on board their hired fleets. This kind of exchange and the production of artefacts were not intended to be used for commerce i.e. profit making, but to prevent a famine.<sup>134</sup> Meyer's position at this point contradicts nothing that Bücher had not pointed out before about the predominantly self-sufficient character of the satisfaction of material needs during this period. Than 'one neighbour helps the other' or the existence of Athenian produce found at Naukratis is not the same as commercial trade.<sup>135</sup> To Meyer, despite the predominant rural character of Homeric Greece, 'these are the days of colonisation, during which all coasts of the Mediterranean....are occupied by the Hellenics'.<sup>136</sup>

The start of this Greek colonisation apparently boosted a dynamic economic growth with trade on a large-scale and in a large trading area.<sup>137</sup> 'After Corinth and Chalcis, Athens took the lead in production and trade of export produce in the *Classical period* (6<sup>th</sup>-5<sup>th</sup> century).<sup>138</sup> 'The Greek merchant even penetrates the centres of oriental trade and competes successfully with the Phoenicians and the Syrians'. And further, 'the development of commercial - very often also political - control of those enormous trading areas presupposes the production of export articles. Considering the smallness and the poverty, this could only have been farming products'.<sup>139</sup>

Meyer faced the difficulty with his suggestion: how are we supposed to envisage the economic predominance of Greece at the end of the 6<sup>th</sup> century if its 'economic' landscape remained poor, small and largely rural? On what basis can a flourishing export industry develop if the ordinary farmer has difficulty in making ends meet? We could simply argue that those most affected by poor food supply were forced to settle abroad and

<sup>133</sup> Meyer refers here to a comment by Hesiod, who allegedly pointed out that 'besides farming, the second activity in which a decent man has to engage in is seamanship'. (*WEdA* p. 104) Besides the fact that Meyer does not leave us with a proper reference on Hesiod's thought, we may also wonder how frequently the ordinary farmer has to walk off his place and has to engage in seamanship.

<sup>134</sup> See Finley (1999) p. 169 ff.

<sup>135</sup> See Prinz (1908).

<sup>136</sup> *WEdA* p. 104, *GdA* vol. II 362 ff.

<sup>137</sup> *WEdA* p. 105, *SA* p. 188f, *GdA* vol. II p. 547.

<sup>138</sup> *WEdA* p. 114.

took their skills and gifts with them, but this would obviously not solve the problem. Meyer believed that with the export of artefacts, slaves were simultaneously imported to satisfy the increasing industrial demand and to bind workers to the 'large estates' ('*Großbetrieb*').<sup>140</sup> Assuming an ongoing process of enslavement, the social and economic relationships and living conditions would change considerably, transforming Archaic Hellas into the 'money economy' of *Classical Greece*. Among the social consequences was the emergence of a new class of 'traders', 'salesmen' and 'factory owners'.<sup>141</sup> The emergence of ancient entrepreneurs, was connected to increasing hardship of the existing farming class, which forced many of them to leave their land and to join seasonal and permanent work in the urban centres. This must have added to the pressure against the ruling aristocracy by strengthening the power of the merchants and factory owners at the same time. This gradual process eventually transformed the previously self-sufficient and largely rural character of Archaic Greece into a trade-dependent nation.<sup>142</sup> The further antiquity progresses, 'the more it penetrates the industrialisation of the Greek world and with it a progressive division of labour'.<sup>143</sup> For instance, he claims that according to Xenophone's example, the increasing division of labour in the large cities as opposed to the variety of skills still performed by one craftsman in the small towns, 'can word for word be applied to the present conditions in the small country town of a few thousand inhabitants and the modern city'.<sup>144</sup> However, Meyer is not prepared to characterise the 'economic' relationships between towns and cities in antiquity in terms of Bücher's 'city-economy' ('*Stadtwirtschaft*') and its production on the basis of customer orders. He added that 'that the large cities are rather a result of the thriving element of trade, which created export production, luxury and a further increased division of labour'.<sup>145</sup>

The continuous urbanisation required constant economic expansion or colonisation of the entire Orient during the *Hellenic period* (4<sup>th</sup> - early 2<sup>nd</sup> century).<sup>146</sup> If this course of social events really did take place in the scope and character described by Meyer, then parallels to the colonial past of the early modern times do indeed become apparent and

<sup>139</sup> *WEa* p. 104 f.

<sup>140</sup> '*Großbetrieb*' is often translated as 'industrial estate'. However, the German term 'industrial' around 1900 was generally more used to describe a production process known in the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> century.

<sup>141</sup> See *WEa* p. 111

<sup>142</sup> *GdA* vol. I.2. p. 555.

<sup>143</sup> *WEa* p. 116. Meyer uses Xenophon (Cyrop, VIII, 2, 5),

<sup>144</sup> *WEa* p. 116.

<sup>145</sup> *WEa* p. 116.

<sup>146</sup> *WEa* p. 135.

appear a logical conclusion. Undeniably, by comparing the economic circumstances of the 14<sup>th</sup> and 15<sup>th</sup> century with Archaic Hellas, Meyer comes to the conclusion that both periods are very similar regarding the emergence and the spreading of manufacturing and commercial trade.<sup>147</sup> The classical period of the 5<sup>th</sup> until the mid 4<sup>th</sup> century BC is then associated with the early capitalist age of the 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> century, since the latter produced even more commodities for export purposes and was characterised by intensifying division of labour and flexible available capital.

Meyer concludes the parallel nature of the ancient and western cultures that ‘one recognises, how untenable the picture is, which Bücher has designed about the development of antiquity. The 7<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> century in Greek history corresponds to the development in the modern times of the 14<sup>th</sup> and 15<sup>th</sup> century AD, the 5<sup>th</sup> corresponds with the 16<sup>th</sup>’;<sup>148</sup> he adds, ‘One cannot imagine enough the modernity of the ancient circumstance [regarding the 5<sup>th</sup> and until the mid 4<sup>th</sup> century BC]’.<sup>149</sup>

However, to any political theorist, Aristotle’s words may come to mind ‘that exchange for profit has no end other than ‘getting a fund of money, and that only by the method of conducting the exchange of commodities’.<sup>150</sup> And one may wonder, how such an early capitalist mode of economy could have emerged if they ancients are so conscious of the evilness of *chrematisticae*, the love of money.<sup>151</sup> Meyer addresses this point by claiming that the real life practices differed considerably from the ethical demands and imposed sanctions of the philosophers. For Meyer, their moral appeals and condemnations of commerce by the means of philosophy and rhetoric are instead indications that the political reality had far from high moral standards.<sup>152</sup> He claimed that the state had to threaten to punish those who are living unjustifiably from state benefit, idlers or those merchants whose greed led to unacceptable exploitative behaviour. Meyer suggested instead that the high level of corruption indirectly led Aristotle to make pointed condemning and systematic remarks about the free tradesman in his *Politics*, but also to pay the whole subject not too much attention.<sup>153</sup>

<sup>147</sup> *WEdA* p. 118 f. See Schneider (1990) p. 435.

<sup>148</sup> *WEdA* pp. 116-117. On the following pages see Meyer’s discussion of ‘democracy’ and the difference in antiquity compared to modern democracies.

<sup>149</sup> *EdV* p. 141.

<sup>150</sup> *Pol.* [1257b21 ff] cited in Meikle (1995b) p. 59 f.

<sup>151</sup> See Wilamowitz (1893) vol. 2 p. 353 f.

<sup>152</sup> *WEdA* p. 126.

<sup>153</sup> Aristotle *Pol.* II, 4, 13. 5, 6. and I, 5, 10. III, 2, 8. 3, 1 ff. See also Meyer’s appreciation of Wilamowitz’ (1893) vol. 2 p. 357 n52.

No doubt, this is one of Meyer's weakest arguments. Even if in times of 'economic' crises the amount of corruption, petty crime and ruthless exploitation may be unusually high, for instance around the time of the birth of Christ or in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, to interpret Aristotle's ethics as having been written as a polemic against the immorality of the ancients, is mere speculation on Meyer's side. This becomes even more apparent when we consider the classical period as a time of relative wealth and political stability. Meyer needs to demonstrate that during such crises, ethical philosophical literature booms and authorities tend to suppress reports on immoral social practices. The intuitive suspicion that it may often have been so perhaps holds some truth, but is in this instance too weakly argued.

Although it is now clear that Meyer perceives particularly the archaic and classical Greece in many ways through the modern eye, we may also underline the fact that it is an invalid simplification to argue that Meyer assigned a modern character to antiquity as a whole.<sup>154</sup> It is also wrong to state that in respect of an alleged modern capitalist character of the classical period, Meyer did idealise such a system. Instead, this period receives very little appraisal in respect of the 'economic' circumstances of his own time. As we have pointed out above in conjunction with the classical period, Athens 'lived from hand to mouth' especially during the 4<sup>th</sup> century. According to Meyer, the picture in other cities was often worse. The behaviour of the 'big capitalists, who through skill and often through unscrupulous exploitation of every favourable situation...created a proletariat increasing in numbers, leaving it with not having enough to live or to die, having to make ends meet either by mercenary services or by becoming bandits or pirates'.<sup>155</sup> His illuminating reports about the great hardship of the ancient craftsman are frequently paved with comparisons to those early modern towns with their farmers and artisans living in deep poverty. For example, he states that 'the farmer is unable to exchange what he has produced for the things he needs; money gets in between, and the market prices are now dependent on the constellation of the large-scale commodity traffic, from the import of overseas products'.<sup>156</sup> According to Meyer, it is in fact the emergence of the money economy itself, overseas trade, etc., which brought the old patriarchal archaic system on to its knees. Excessive interest rates went hand in hand with the decline of the strong agrarian sector, which led to land losses and impoverishment of farmers, who, from then on, had to trade their crafts as

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<sup>154</sup> Finley (1980) p. 30. See 'Beloch-Meyer modernism'.

<sup>155</sup> *WEdA* p. 133.

free labourers in the cities.

Besides the undeniable comparisons between certain periods of antiquity and modernity in Meyer's *WEa*, the *SA* and the *GdA*, he elucidates also an additional and often overlooked fact. In opposition to some authors, Meyer clearly did not create a homogenous and monochrome picture of the ancient 'economic' life and underlined clearly the existence and importance of sometimes very 'far reaching' economic and cultural relationships between kingdoms and city-states.<sup>157</sup> Although 'economic' considerations play an important part in Meyer's assessment of the modern character of the classical period (economic history also became a fashionable subject in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century), he also highlighted the differences between what we may call 'ancient' and 'modern' capitalism.<sup>158</sup> This dissimilarity is for Meyer to be found in the role of the *polis*, which is in antiquity the 'only carrier of economic life'.<sup>159</sup> The state seems to fulfil a central role in authorising and governing commercial activity, but how significant its role may have been in respect of 'economic' matters remains unspecified by Meyer. Bücher too argued that 'economic' relationships did not take place between independent trading partners. It seems that at least for the archaic and the early classical period, Meyer casts some doubt over the institutionalisation of private business as unconstrained agents.

Until this point Meyer had restrained himself from comparing Hellenic Greece (late 4<sup>th</sup> to early 2<sup>nd</sup> century) with the 18<sup>th</sup> or the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Only on one occasion we hear of Carthage, which was already in the classical period due to its aggressive repression of 'everything foreign' had a similarly large economic influence as Venice or the European colonial powers during the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>160</sup> The reason for the absence of the 19<sup>th</sup> century in antiquity will be elucidated below. By doing so, we shall find that Meyer's account of the cyclic economic development of the ancient cultures finds its conclusion with an analysis of the decline of the Hellenic world and the Roman Empire. Here his comparisons and parallels between modernity and late antiquity become most apparent and methodologically questionable.

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<sup>156</sup> *WEa* p. 109.

<sup>157</sup> *WEa* p. 98 and p. 112

<sup>158</sup> We need to note that the term 'ancient capitalism' does not appear in the *WEa* and in *SA*

<sup>159</sup> *WEa* p. 111.

<sup>160</sup> See *WEa* p. 134.

*iv. The Decline of Hellas and Ancient Rome*

"The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire" is still one of the most fascinating topics in historical studies in general'.<sup>161</sup> This is how Karl Christ describes a topic to which Eduard Meyer has substantially contributed and which is still of great interest today. Meyer's relatively short but concise essays *WEaA* and *SA* regarding the subject of the 'economic' and political decline of antiquity show much more explicitly the author's political commitments, worries and his philosophical background than his famous encyclopaedia *Die Geschichte des Altertums (GdA)* does. Perhaps Meyer expected that his papers would find a wider audience and would gain publicity, since they were presented to scholars working in a variety of different academic disciplines and therefore included political comments. The 5<sup>th</sup> volume of the *GdA*, however, deals similarly concisely with the issue of the demise of Hellas and Rome. With this investigation into the Hellenic period Meyer paints a rather bleak, but at the same time very complex, picture of a catastrophic ending of Greek civilisation. Besides its encyclopaedic qualities, Meyer's work also shows an intense reflection on problems and topics raised by Oswald Spengler's work *Der Untergang des Abendlandes (The Decline of the Occident)*.<sup>162</sup>

The decline of Hellas was sealed with the 'Hellenisation' of the entire Orient, which allowed overpopulated Greece to spread into Asia and found new cities, which were in general throughout antiquity the dominating carrier of culture. According to Meyer, through this process the Hellenic culture rises to become a 'world culture' ('*Weltkultur*').<sup>163</sup> The spreading of Greek civilisation and its artefacts led to an ever-increased concentration of the export industry in the large cities. Their serious advantage over the division of labour led eventually to the decline of the smaller, still largely self-sufficient country towns. The demise of Hellas emerged from the wealth of the cities, which crowded-out farming. Its impoverished rural population was forced to move into the towns and from the towns into the cities by selling their labour power 'as in modern times in England'.<sup>164</sup> Besides the development of large-scale capital, pauperism rose and the existence of large-scale slavery made it difficult to absorb the roaming free labour, since slave owners were making migration difficult, by undercutting wages and efficiency in production. 'As town

<sup>161</sup> Christ (1983) p. 199.

<sup>162</sup> See Lehmann (1993) p. 78.

<sup>163</sup> See *WEaA* p. 135 f.

absorbs country, so does the city absorb the town'.<sup>165</sup> The formation of such a *metropolis* of trade and production driven by the Hellenic expansions is by all means a modern character (18<sup>th</sup> century), which according to Meyer left the centres of Hellas increasingly depopulated and remote from the new trading roots and the centres of production. Internally, the increase of bureaucracy, a catastrophic public finance situation, property changes and the disintegrating power of Athens moved the whole of ancient Greek 'motherland' deeper and deeper into crisis and eventually into decline. The result of this massive urbanisation connected with the decline of the smaller country towns now situated off the major trade roots, is of course not a sign of the recurrence of the early feudal system.<sup>166</sup> The social rift in property possession and political power has shifted to a deep social divide between the masses of proletarians and the 'ancient bourgeoisie'. The concentration of unimaginable wealth and luxury on the one hand, and devastating poverty on the other, led to a decline in production resulting in a desolate farming sector and a decline of the handicraft skills due to a backdrop of demand. The high degree of specialisation in the crafts created also a further inflexibility in adapting to broader and more basic demands. For Meyer, the blame for this devastation is to be carried by men's greed and improvidence, which led to a dramatic drop in birth rates and marriages for mere selfish reasons.<sup>167</sup> Besides this psychological or sociological point, we should not overlook the fact that 'slavery had a corroding impact' on the political stability in the *polis*.<sup>168</sup> The fruits of the Hellenic expansion are for Meyer visible in the '*Lagidenreich*' of Alexandria, which 'governs now the powers of modern life - trade, money and education - which are concentrated in its capital'.<sup>169</sup> Meyer pointed out in respect to this period that in 'opposition to the commonly held view, which is also vulgarised amongst the scientific community, we cannot think modern enough'.<sup>170</sup> He also adds in a footnote that 'it is a tale, which causes a lot of mischief that the ancient scholars thought differently from modern scholars' about the nature of mankind.<sup>171</sup> This modern understanding of the decline of Hellas should however, according to Meyer, not be applied to the 19<sup>th</sup> century, but to the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> century, a position which he would modify later. Meyer points out that in those days 'wind and

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<sup>164</sup> *WEa* p. 133 f.

<sup>165</sup> *WEa* p. 137.

<sup>166</sup> See *WEa* p. 138.

<sup>167</sup> See *WEa* p. 139 f.

<sup>168</sup> See *WEa* p. 129.

<sup>169</sup> *WEa* p. 139.

<sup>170</sup> *WEa* p. 141.

weather' as well as the transport conditions often hampered a flourishing sea traffic, which was also disturbed by devastating wars. This is however not to say that Meyer denied that a '*Volkswirtschaft*' in the Bücherian sense did not exist already in this period.<sup>172</sup> The reason for this brief sketch of Meyer's ancient history is not only of historiographical interest. His account of the decline of Hellas was strongly influenced by the traditional scholarship of Büchschütz, Böckh and also Pöhlmann, all mentioning some geological considerations too. However, the data and significance for a meteorological investigation is a little dubious and has only recently become subject to detailed geological analysis.

Meyer's application of modern terminology such as 'plant' or 'industry' in the context of the Hellenic and the Roman Empire is not only due to a lack of distinct concepts in economic history as Schneider asserted, but rather intentional.<sup>173</sup> If we allow that Meyer knew about the difference between '*Fabrik*' and '*Werkstadt*' ('plant' and 'workshop'), then the reason for using such modern concepts must lie elsewhere. Meyer did not only draw parallels between archaic Greece and the Middle Ages, but saw also similarities between Hellenic Greece and Rome. He claimed that when the Greek culture spread out from Askra, Athens and Alexandria, it became shallower and therefore more vulnerable. This fact allowed for the rise of the Roman Empire, which played previously only a marginal role. Rome went through a similar course of social development. From a rural small scale farming economy to large-scale capitalism.

Rome's attainment of 'world domination during the period of the Republic (300 BC-68 AD) could only be achieved by expanding its territories. This power 'was the work of the publicly and militarily organised farmer cast'.<sup>174</sup> During the Roman Republic farmers were still carrying out most of the work by themselves or with the help of a few slaves. 'In the cities namely of the south but also in Rome has a not unimportant industry developed, trade and financial transactions play a big role'.<sup>175</sup> The fast emerging progress led, however, to a shift in the political powers from the farming class to those new wealthy citizens of the cities. The crowding-out of the essential conditions of the small farmers' existence led to 'devastating and permanent agrarian crisis'.<sup>176</sup> Similarly, during the Hellenic period, the increase in human wants and the concentration of wealth in the cities led to a dramatic

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<sup>171</sup> *WEa* p. 141 n2.

<sup>172</sup> *WEa* p. 141.

<sup>173</sup> Schneider (1990) p. 435.

<sup>174</sup> *SA* p. 203.

<sup>175</sup> *SA* p. 203.

<sup>176</sup> *SA* p. 204.

increase in the migration to the cities. However, the main cause for the decline of the rural stand was the increase in cheap corn imports and ‘the small farmer cannot any longer defy the foreign competition’.<sup>177</sup> The more efficient slave farming *latifundi* relatively quickly crowded out the institutionalised small farming stand.

‘The city economy based on tenant-ship and free craftsmanship is no longer effective; instead large numbers of prisoners, which the big wars threw onto the market annually, form the material which costs little money and can be fully exploited’.<sup>178</sup> How the destruction of the countryside by the *latifundi* went ahead is not primarily important to Meyer. However, the intensity of the exploitation of the slaves constitutes a well known explanation for the insurrections of the 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> century AD. ‘They were of course not reactions against the institution of slavery *per se* - since no one was able to pose a serious threat against it’, but because the *latifundi* had to resort to enslavement of previously free citizens of Greece and Egypt in order to satisfy the fast-increasing demand for more labourers.<sup>179</sup> ‘This is how the devastating effects of slavery can appear to us. One may maintain that a similar development in modern times - the period of free labour, is absolutely impossible. I would like to doubt whether this is correct’.<sup>180</sup> ‘The idea to import Chinese drudges into Germany will be difficult to realise, but how significantly the rural population has declined and drained off into the cities is well known’.<sup>181</sup> The examples used by Meyer are the poor rural areas of the *Lausitz* in north-eastern *Saxony* - the south-east Elbian territories about which Max Weber has written his influential post-doctoral thesis.<sup>182</sup> The vast concentration of capital and its uprooting power led, as previously in Hellenic antiquity, to the decline of the independent cities with a shortage of resources and a loss of identity. The downfall of the Roman Empire, which preceded the return to the barter economy (*‘Naturalwirtschaft’*) indicates that the circle of economic development of antiquity is complete once again.<sup>183</sup> However, there is a comment by Meyer which is often overlooked which indicates that he did not apply the problems of modern Germany to all aspects of the Hellenic period or the late Roman empire. The main reason for Meyer is that ‘the ancient world became culturally and politically a unity and therefore did not have the

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<sup>177</sup> SA p. 204.

<sup>178</sup> SA p. 205.

<sup>179</sup> See SA p. 206.

<sup>180</sup> SA p. 207.

<sup>181</sup> SA p. 207 f.

<sup>182</sup> See Weber (1991).

<sup>183</sup> WEdA. p. 150.

necessary export markets'. In contrast 'modern heavy industry does crucially depend on the development of and the extension of foreign export markets'.<sup>184</sup> From the period of the emperors (2<sup>nd</sup> century) the system of slavery was in decline. For this time, Meyer asserts that the large estates did indeed live and produce for their own needs and wants, but what may be correct for the late Roman empire cannot so easily be applied to antiquity as a whole as the 'popular understanding' likes to argue.<sup>185</sup> This assertion is obviously directed against Bücher's and Rodbertus' '*Oikewirtschaft*'. The ebbing of slavery caused by the enfranchisement of slaves led to a strengthening of the rural areas, which were previously neglected. However, the decline of antiquity is not to be explained with industrialisation and free wage labour, but is rather due to a shift from the urban centres back to a feudal system. Meyer argues vehemently against the positions held by Schmoller and Mommsen that the institution of slavery led to antiquity's decline.<sup>186</sup> 'The best proof that slavery did not play a role in antiquity's decline is that the 'question of slavery' ('*Sklavenfrage*') did not exist anymore during the period of the emperors, and significant uprisings of slaves did not occur any more...slavery died out gradually until the beginning of the modern period ['*Neuzeit*'], which was exclusively due to the transition of the 'economic' circumstances'.<sup>187</sup> 'The development returns to the point where it began; the mediaeval world-order gains power for the second time'.<sup>188</sup>

This period of decline (mainly the Augustan 354-430AD period) was called by Theodor Mommsen the 'evening',<sup>189</sup> Eduard Schwartz called it 'the autumn'<sup>190</sup> and Eduard Meyer called it the 'old man's age' of the Roman Empire.<sup>191</sup> This was the last period before the final collapse of the empire leading up to the disappearance of the ancient civilisation all together. Meyer, as well as Mommsen, blamed the decline of the Roman Empire, politically, on imperialism, economically on capitalism and morally or culturally on the decadence of ancient city life.<sup>192</sup>

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<sup>184</sup> SA p. 208.

<sup>185</sup> SA p. 208.

<sup>186</sup> See SA p. 210 f.

<sup>187</sup> SA p. 210.

<sup>188</sup> SA p. 210. This is the final remark of Meyer's SA.

<sup>189</sup> Mommsen (1856/1909) vol. III p. 630.

<sup>190</sup> See Schwartz '*Weltreich und Weltfriede*' [Speech 01/10/16] in Schwartz (1936/63) vol. I p. 173 f.

<sup>191</sup> See Demandt (1990) p. 166.

<sup>192</sup> Demandt (1990) p. 165.

v. *'Et Pax Anglosaxonia Pax Romana Est'*<sup>193</sup>

The well-balanced and differentiated picture of the gradual decline of ancient Hellas and Rome elaborated in the *GdA*, the *SA* and the *WEaA*, earned Meyer the reputation of being one of the 'most eminent historians of his time'.<sup>194</sup> From the above sketch of his account on the character of the 'economic' development of antiquity, it is perhaps difficult to see why his opponents, mainly amongst the '*Nationalökonomie*', argued with such harshness against his position. Meyer's political commitments and views are essential ingredients in understanding the polemic course of the Controversy in all its aspects.

Meyer himself was a dedicated supporter of the 'Prussian-German nation state'; as an enthusiastic historian he warned frequently about the danger if politics is no longer able to control the enticement of wealth and power in modern politics. Such failure had its devastating historical examples in 'capitalist' Hellenic Greece and in 'imperialistic' Augustinian Rome, which led due to the economic transition, to their cultural decline.<sup>195</sup> For Meyer with the social and economic crisis of Western Europe during the second quarter of the 19<sup>th</sup> century and the first quarter of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the vicious historical circle of decline was reached again. For example, Meyer raised the question whether mass unemployment like in the German *Reich* could not have had parallels to economic problems in the ancient cities, when they lost their export markets?<sup>196</sup> Most worrying to Meyer was that certain essential contemporary problems showed, according to him, 'the very same structure and pattern as certain political crises in antiquity', which in the latter case, led eventually to antiquity's decline and disintegration. He thought that this would also be conceivable for the German '*Kaiserreich*', which faced the very same existential crisis as ancient Rome did. Meyer was however not a fatalist. If this demise of Germany would be the logical consequence, or the rational conclusion of history, then every decent patriotic scholar must stand firmly against those political and social forces that could seriously contribute to the decline of the German nation.<sup>197</sup> Meyer's committed patriotism manifested itself most clearly in his writings at the outbreak of, and during, the World War,

<sup>193</sup> The idea for this headline stems from a similar article title by Meikle (1989).

<sup>194</sup> See Badian 'Eduard Meyer's America Paralipomena' in Demandt (1990) p. 161.

<sup>195</sup> See Schneider (1990) p. 443.

<sup>196</sup> *SA* p. 201.

<sup>197</sup> See Meyer (1924). For Meyer's America and England 'picture' see 'Eduard Meyer - Zu Zeit und Werk' (1991) pp. 45-54.

which was a crucial historical event and forced the established historical scholarship to rethink their theoretical positions. The new dimension in German historiography was the attempt to agitate against the fatal effects of a possible American or Russian domination of Europe. This includes of course a scientific effort to predict history instead of restraining oneself to the mere ‘understanding’ of the past.<sup>198</sup> For Meyer, the fundamental example was the decline and collapse of ancient cultures put into the context of a possible demise of Western culture. We noted above that in the *WEdA* and the *SA* the analogies between antiquity and modern times (*‘Neuzeit’*) fell silent with the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> century. Apart from one occasion, Meyer excluded explicitly the late 19<sup>th</sup> century for any comparisons with late Rome or the Hellenics.<sup>199</sup> The character and sheer scale of the World War changed the explanatory importance of the decline of ancient Rome in the minds of German historians and in Eduard Meyer’s perception in particular. Never before had Meyer drawn such straight and drastic parallels between the modern and the Roman worlds as in his political and polemic essays and ‘war papers’ (*‘Kriegsvorträge’*), where history had to serve certain ideological ends.<sup>200</sup>

After the Napoleonic liberty wars, the early-mid 19<sup>th</sup> century Europe was largely characterised by the peaceful and sometimes bellicose formation of competing and coexisting industrial national cultures. The optimistic, commerce-driven spirit of modernity, which rested largely upon the Enlightenment ideal of the superiority of mankind to be able to control nature by the means of the empirical sciences, ran dry and into a deep crisis with the outbreak of the World War, through which Europe witnessed a culminating struggle for universal hegemony.<sup>201</sup> For Meyer, as during the period of Hannibal, modern Europe had lived out its zenith and he predicted that it would lose its political importance or would exhaust itself in wars between its battling nations.<sup>202</sup> This event and its gloomy prospect must have had a strong psychological impact on Meyer. Whilst during the 1890s and into the first decade of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, Meyer’s analogies between modern and ancient times were carefully thought out and expressed a differentiated picture, his later political writings, in particular during and after the World War, seem to be ‘more the works of

<sup>198</sup> This aspect shall be further investigated in Part I.2.v and shall be extensively discussed in Part II.

<sup>199</sup> Demandt’s claim that these parallels ended in the 16<sup>th</sup> century already is incorrect. (1990) p. 165 See Meyer (1910) p. I 258.

<sup>200</sup> The following points are linked to Meyer’s essays *‘Nordamerika und Deutschland’*, *‘Weltgeschichte, Haniball’* and *‘England und der Krieg’* in Meyer (1924a). The basic idea is taken from Demandt (1990) in Calder III (1990) pp. 163-207.

<sup>201</sup> Demandt (1990) p. 166.

passion than the work of science', his friend and colleague Friedrich Meinecke had remarked in 1913.<sup>203</sup>

According to Meyer, Europe had lost its dominating power in the world and after its archaic and its classical period had now entered its late period ('*Spätzeit*') - the last act had begun. The only open question was who would benefit from this dramatic conflict? At the very beginning of the war, Meyer thought that Germany played the role of Rome. If Germany was to lose this war Russia would overrun it, he claimed.<sup>204</sup> If both nations would belliciously exhaust themselves against each other, Meyer feared that the Asian nations would benefit and gain a predominant power in Europe.<sup>205</sup> However, this perception was to change considerably towards the end of the war when its tragic outcome and sheer scale of mass destruction loomed as an unavoidable consequence. Now Hannibal became Hindenburg, in the sense that both political figures were patriots and fighters for a pluralism of coexisting nation states, and Germany was Carthage.<sup>206</sup> Here we are reminded of Brecht's famous analogy expressed when the Nazis came to power 1933.<sup>207</sup> Analogies of this kind are common in poetic literature, but do they have a place in scientific historical writing? In order to draw such analogies, Meyer must have set aside almost every substantial political difference between modern Germany and ancient Carthage. Or did Meyer reduce the political circumstances to its greatest common denominator? Although the Semitic Carthagian culture was not usually regarded in a sympathetic light by academics and politicians across Europe during the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century, it was nevertheless for Meyer a highly suitable example of what could happen to a flourishing nation if culturally and politically run over by an aggressor.<sup>208</sup>

In the years of war, Meyer also drew analogies between Rome and Germany, both domestically and in respect of their international relations; this formed 'a striking

<sup>202</sup> Demandt (1990) p. 161 n30.

<sup>203</sup> Demandt (1990) p. 162 n11. Cf. Meinecke (1962) vol. VI p. 61.

<sup>204</sup> See Meyer (1910) p. 214, 256. Meyer (1915) p. 200 ff. And see also Meinecke's comments on Meyer's pessimism during the World War in Meinecke (1962) vol. VI p. 76.

<sup>205</sup> See Demandt (1990) p. 166.

<sup>206</sup> Meyer (1924a) vol. II p. 543.

<sup>207</sup> 'The Great Cartage led three wars. After the first one it was still powerful. After the second one it was still inhabitable. After the third war one could not find it anymore'. Brecht (1933).

<sup>208</sup> *GdA* vol. I.2. p. 415 f. If we compare *GdA* vol. I.1. pp. 73-80. It is clear that Meyer rejects any racially discriminating and anti-Semitic arguments as part of social anthropology. He highlights instead the ancient civilisations did not know any discrimination on the basis of race, even not against the 'Negro cultures' and that the term 'race' (*Rasse*) is a rather modern concept. On the subject of intellectual and popular anti-Semitism before the Holocaust see very recently Lindemann (2000).

analogy'.<sup>209</sup> Meyer reaffirmed the old reproach against America that what is often interpreted as Rome's 'just wars' against other peoples, were in fact aggressive wars. The claim to preserve world-peace and peoples brotherhood were for Meyer purely hypothetical and artificial constructions to shield the imperialist intentions of ancient Rome and now of modern America.<sup>210</sup> According to Meyer, Rome was culturally colonised by the Greeks and then went on to dominate the world economically. America was also built on European culture and was now about to Americanise Europe commercially.<sup>211</sup> Such swift comparisons occurred in Meyer's writings in particular towards the end of the World War, where the images of rising 'Dollar Sun' and of the 'American Way of Life' started to gain a foothold in Western Europe influencing millions, poor and rich, to try their luck across the ocean. America's cultural representation across Europe was for Meyer a clear sign of a cultural and political decline in Europe culture, and he was certainly not alone with his anti-Anglo-Saxon fears and sentiments. Encouraged and infuriated by the Versailles Treaty, nationalism and racism found a fertile ground amongst the German public and in parts amongst its intellectuals. Even parts of the dethroned German aristocracy and parts of the social democrats and communists joined the anti-America campaign, which was primarily directed against its commercial values and so called 'libertarian principles'. As with the rejection of 'Manchester Capitalism' in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, to Meyer and many others it was clear that commercial freedom fitted well with America's economic strategy to make Europe commercially and hence politically dependent.

For Meyer though, cultural progress and flourishing societies could only develop inside and amongst free nations, which are able to coexist with one another peacefully and only with a minimum of bellicose force, but never with the aim of eradicating neighbouring countries. Once occupied and run as a satellite or colony, the cultural decline of the particular nation is inevitable. In history, according to Meyer, this was particularly true for the Roman Empire and was to repeat itself for the European nations if they would not resist this cultural and economic annexation. Rome was blamed for the downfall of antiquity. Now, 'the guilt for the decline of Europe is to be carried partly by England but mainly by America'.<sup>212</sup> A last opportunity to avert the demise of Europe was missed with the failure of

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<sup>209</sup> Meyer (1915b) p. 37.

<sup>210</sup> Meyer (1915b) p. 250 cited in Demandt (1990) p. 170.

<sup>211</sup> Meyer (1915b) p. 260.

<sup>212</sup> Meyer (1915) p. 212.

the Southern States to create a counterbalancing power to the Union States.<sup>213</sup>

Such fears of an American global superpower were common place amongst European historians and were particularly drastically formulated by German scholars for obvious reasons. For example, Friedrich Meinecke argued alongside Meyer that analogous to the *Pax Romana*, a *Pax Anglosaxonia* would govern the world economically and politically.<sup>214</sup> That is to say, that as the Greek city-states in the Roman Empire were forced to do so, the nations of Western Europe might continue to exist, but only as ‘shadows’ of their former selves and by sacrificing their national integrity. ‘However, almost certainly we can expect a cultural mishmash under an Anglo-Saxon rule’, of which Meyer as well as Meinecke were both not very fond of. ‘The autonomy of the states and nations is from a world-historic viewpoint eventually over’.<sup>215</sup> Meinecke’s concerns are similar to Meyer’s, that of a ‘cultural uniformity of a denationalised global empire’.<sup>216</sup> As we noted above, Meyer maintained that Prussia-Germany and America are related to each other like Carthage to Rome. However, Meinecke compared Germany rather with Macedonian-Greece, which has at least some justification in the light of the great but doomed effort to recreate the spirit of Hellas by the German Romanticists such as Herder and Schiller and the legacy of classical Greece amongst the Humanists like Hölderlin and the Humboldt brothers.<sup>217</sup> This idealisation of the Greeks for education, architecture and German literature could of course not escape the sarcastic and ironic comments by the ‘free spirits’ Heinrich Heine, and later Friedrich Nietzsche.<sup>218</sup> For Meyer and Meinecke, Germany was the last serious power of pan-European nationalism, which stood against the decline of European cultural coexistence and was therefore a nation which deserved for itself a ‘place in the sun’.<sup>219</sup> This was a strong attack against American cultural and corporate imperialism, which according to Meyer imprints its morality, its economic capitalism and culture onto

<sup>213</sup> Meyer (1924a) vol. I p. 256. See also Meyer’s pupil and colleague Ulrich Kahrstedt (1925).

<sup>214</sup> A good overview about the life and academic achievements of Friedrich Meinecke can be found in Heuss (1957) pp. 329-350.

<sup>215</sup> Meinecke (1919) p. 98 ff.

<sup>216</sup> Meyer (1916) p. 23.

<sup>217</sup> The sympathy of the German ‘*Geist*’ towards Greece goes back as early as the 16<sup>th</sup> century, which was re-emphasised and re-employed in various different ways by the German enlightenment thinkers Winkelmann and Herder, Schiller, Goethe and Hölderlin that influenced critical thought in the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

<sup>218</sup> Characteristic of the enlightenment view of human nature was to regard all humans as being of the same anthropological nature, which led to an idealisation of human reasoning in theories of the natural right ‘*Naturrecht*’, which has its roots in antiquity. Heine and Nietzsche did not argue against Aristotle’s ethics of character building within the just *polis*, but against the romanticism of the ancient ethos by Herder, Goethe and Schiller. See Heuss (1957) p. 354 f.

<sup>219</sup> See Demandt (1990) p. 168.

the nations of Europe.

When in 1919 international demands for the extradition of war criminals were raised by the allied forces, including the German Kaiser Willhelm II, a storm of protest broke out at German universities and amongst politicians across existing ideological divides, turning Meyer's previous affiliation with British and American universities sour. He blurted out proudly that he 'ripped apart his honourable doctoral degrees from Oxford, Liverpool, St Andrews, Chicago and Harvard'.<sup>220</sup> According to Meyer, the outcome of the war and the economic stranglehold of the Treaty of Versailles programmed an unforeseeable number of wars yet to come.<sup>221</sup> As we know, Meyer was right in his assessment, but he gave a one-sided prediction about future causes of such conflicts.<sup>222</sup> Still, in 1929 he wrote in a letter to Oswald Spengler that America was to him 'one of our most disgusting enemies'.<sup>223</sup>

Always aware of the changing political climate, Meyer in his 'Principal Speech' at the Humboldt University Berlin in 1919 argued that with the emergence of the Weimar Republic, the collapsed German monarchy only formed an intermediate stage in the development of the German nation. This was a point which Meyer had not previously made. Although Meyer rejected the newly constituted democratic system in Germany because it would apparently remove individual responsibility and replace it with state administration;<sup>224</sup> he acknowledged at the same time that in opposition to French materialism or Anglo-Saxon individualism, the German Social Democrats preserved at least a kind of idealism.<sup>225</sup> This was certainly true for many parts of '*Sozialdemokratie*' who regardless of their internationalist manifesto prioritised the 'national question' not only in the cross-parliamentary agreement of 1914, but also during the 1920s. However, in a letter to Oswald Spengler, Meyer ascertained with regret, that the German Social Democracies have failed badly in the struggle against the 'terrible guise of the soulless, merely

<sup>220</sup> Meyer (1924a) vol. I p. vi.

<sup>221</sup> See Meyer (1915).

<sup>222</sup> Meyer's patriotism for the German nation state comes also to light in a remark made in the *Vorwort* to the 5<sup>th</sup> edition of the *GdA* vol. I.1 (April 12 1925) p. III-IV: 'I believed in summer 1914 that I came to the stage, after the first volume of my *Geschichte des Altertums* was ready in its third edition, that I would be able to start energetically with its revision. This made the outbreak of the World War impossible. The defence war for the existence of our people, to which destruction our enemies from all over the world have ailed themselves in predacious aggression, forced me to subordinate all of my powers and activity for the one important aim'.

<sup>223</sup> Demandt (1990) p. 169.

<sup>224</sup> Meyer (1924a) II p. 584.

<sup>225</sup> Meyer (1924a) II p. 584, 557 ff. A similar pessimistic position was held by Spengler and earlier by Sybel and Treitschke. See Schleier (1965).

mechanical capitalism'.<sup>226</sup> Although Meyer rejected wholeheartedly the Weimar Republic, he spoke out against the assassination of Walter Rahtenau, the Social Democrat Mayor of Munich, in 1924 and advocated the agrarian reforms of the same year.<sup>227</sup> It is suggested that Meyer in his younger years was sympathetic towards socialism and that Meyer's domestic political opinion was in accordance with Spengler's idea of '*Preußentum und Sozialismus*'.<sup>228</sup> It is difficult to see any evidence of this in his later work. However, what seems to be fairly clear is that Meyer believed in the core of Prussian values such as duty, justice and appreciation of hard and honest labour as the panacea to Germany's misfortunes. He did not support the decadence of the German monarchy in particular and the aristocracy in general, but approved of their right to exist as an institution as long as they would fulfil their social and political responsibilities. However, it became clear to Meyer that they failed to do so not only in Germany but also in Tsarist Russia. Alexander Demandt argued that his support for certain aspects of the new Soviet Russia became more transparent in his sympathetic judgements of Lenin's *NEP* (New Economic Policy) in 1922. That Meyer judged Lenin as one of the greatest statesmen after Bismarck indicates his great respect and appreciation for a strong historical figure. This connects much more realistically with Meyer's compassion towards an implementation of Prussian-Protestant ethical standards or political ethos, than sympathising alternatively towards the Bolsheviks and the working-class movement in general. It seems that the last resort to avert the demise of Germany is its 'east-orientation' towards Soviet Russia.<sup>229</sup>

Meyer's Prussian-nationalist commitment and conservative ethos led him to reject the idea of continuous progress in history. Especially the decades after the turn of the century represented to him the demise of the European cultures at the hands of the Americans. In that respect 'Prussian-Germany is Carthage' and America is Rome. His political compassion blinded him to the fundamental differences between Ancient Rome and America culturally and politically, and damaged his scholarly reputation in Western Europe. However, besides Meyer's political motivation to equip us with lessons from the past, his methodology has a serious philosophical background and an established tradition. By elucidating his method and philosophy of history, we should be able to understand

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<sup>226</sup> See Spengler (1963) p. 202 ff.

<sup>227</sup> See Näf (1990) p. 308.

<sup>228</sup> Cited from *Vossische Zeitung* (19/09/1915). See Spengler (1921)

<sup>229</sup> For more detail about Meyer's orientation towards the East and his visit to Moscow and Leningrad see Demandt (1990) p. 170 f.

better how such parallels can be drawn between past and present without merely projecting one's personal views onto history and its particular events.

### vi. Meyer's Philosophy of History

We ended the last chapter on an almost anecdotal note of Meyer's later works and views on world politics during the 1920s. This was an important move in order to show how current affairs can have considerable effects on the interpretation of the comparability of past and present. However, it would be unfair and too one-sided if we ended our discussion of Meyer's work with a harsh criticism of the poorly judged and exaggerated parallels of an ageing scholar. More interesting than his bitter political outbursts is the explanation of his early comparisons between Classical Greece and the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries. On what basis, if at all, are such comparisons possible? Is not every historical period and its events unique? Such questions may concern perhaps those who believe in the ultimate individuality of human experience. However, Meyer's philosophical starting point originates in a different tradition - the tradition of German historicism.

The historicist approach in German historiography with which Meyer largely concurred begins its analyses from the present or current perspective. This appears even clearer, if one regards the past as connected to the present via causality and analogy. This is not to say that only those past events are important, which had a crucial influence or effect on how the present emerged from the past.<sup>230</sup> However, Meyer maintained that we could only investigate into history in as far as events have left traces in the present.<sup>231</sup> Thus, for Meyer, 'through the reciprocal illumination of history the present becomes important and through the illumination of the present history becomes comprehensible'.<sup>232</sup>

Meyer has sketched out his account of the nature of historical studies mainly in two works. The basis for his work on this subject is the 'Einleitung' of the *Geschichte des Altertums* (1884).<sup>233</sup> Those first theoretical considerations formed the basis to his essay *Zur Theorie und Methodik der Geschichte (THEORIE)* of 1902. This essay forms a more sophisticated attempt to deal with the methodological and historio-theoretical challenges which materialism and empiricism posed to the traditional historiography. The first edition of Meyer's *THEORIE* found an important critical reception and appreciation in Max Weber's *Kritische Studien der Kulturwissenschaftlichen Logik* of 1906 and later in Emile

<sup>230</sup> *GdA* vol. I.1 p. 191, Meyer (1924) vol. II p. 583 and *GdA* vol. I.1 p. 188.

<sup>231</sup> See Demandt (1990) p. 165 n27. See *GdA* vol. I.1 p. 188 f., p. 191 f. *THEORIE* p. 583.

<sup>232</sup> Demandt (1990) p. 165.

<sup>233</sup> See Näf in Calder III (1990) p. 288 f. For an analysis about the background of the *GdA*.

Durkheim's work.<sup>234</sup> The fairly few alterations of his position in the first edition of the *Kleine Schriften* (1910, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. 1924) did not have an additional impact on the theoretical discussion in German historiography.<sup>235</sup> We shall therefore concentrate on the 1902 text but complementary to this for the understanding of Meyer's position is the 'Einleitung' of the *GdA*.<sup>236</sup>

The *THEORIE* starts with the provocative statement that 'history is not a systematic science'.<sup>237</sup> By elaborating his argument he stresses that the 'historical method' (*Historische Methode*) does not fall into the fallacy of giving an account of historical studies as an integrated universal system. 'The practice of the historian follows its own inner commands, which the material itself imposes onto the composition'.<sup>238</sup> According to Meyer, the 'historical method' formulates only those rules and experiences and 'knack', which do belong to the specific historical subject or branch (e.g. the numismatics), but this is not the same as following the 'crazy belief' to be able to subsume all history under a single method or principle. Instead the historian faces the challenge of understanding the particular historical problem. The discovery of its solution can only be borne from within the mind of the scientist.<sup>239</sup> His teacher can only explain, how according to his experience, he approaches the problem; but a historian must develop their own understanding by dealing with the matter freely, and only partly by guidance.<sup>240</sup> The more creative independence is involved the gradually higher or more important is the particular research field in amongst others. A particular human action or event is then more important and is generally also seen as such when it is not easily comprehensible under a single rule or law. Meyer argues implicitly against the method associated with Marxist historical materialism, which in Meyer's view 'measures the value of labour activity solely in terms of the "socially required" working time'.<sup>241</sup> Initially the historian faces his material as a mere accumulation of unconnected past events. The question which then emerges is how these facts relate to human knowledge in general and the sciences. According to Meyer, this is

<sup>234</sup> See Näf in Calder III (1990) p. 296.

<sup>235</sup> Näf in Calder III (1990) p. 299

<sup>236</sup> *GdA* vol. I.1. Cited 5<sup>th</sup> edition (1925), which is almost unchanged from the 2<sup>nd</sup> edition (1907). Extensively on Meyer's *Anthropology* see Mippel in Calder III (1990) pp. 312-328.

<sup>237</sup> *THEORIE* p. 1.

<sup>238</sup> *THEORIE* p. 1.

<sup>239</sup> *THEORIE* p. 2.

<sup>240</sup> See *THEORIE* p. 2.

<sup>241</sup> *THEORIE* p. 2.

the task of the philosopher, but it also concerned him deeply as a historian.<sup>242</sup> The definition and demarcation of history is particularly important in respect of the task of anthropology or sociology. These latter sciences, Meyer ascertained, claimed to have the only valid and practical conception of historical studies in order to satisfy the needs of the 'modern way of thought'.<sup>243</sup> The threat of those modern ideas originated mainly in materialism and empiricism, which both attained, in different forms and versions, increasing popularity especially amongst the '*Nationalökonomie*' and amongst the natural sciences. By postulating that the previous methodology of history was wrong, they aim to subsume and reform the previously well established and 'higher standing' historical studies under the methodology of 'science'.<sup>244</sup> This manifests mainly in three claims against historical studies. First, like the natural sciences, history should look for laws of recurrence of certain events. The discovery of such laws, which connect 'cause and effect necessarily with one another' belittles and degrades the historical event to a mere sign of those universally operating laws which govern the world of human affairs.<sup>245</sup> Consequently, the 'individual moments', which were previously magisterial in order to explain the course of history, are now subsumed by the quest for historic laws. This applies especially to the denial of the notion of 'accident' ('*Zufall*') in history. Secondly, the 'free and self-determining will' has no place in history anymore and therefore leaves the particular 'personality' ('*Persönlichkeit*') in history as insignificant. The same fate awaits any significance of 'ideas' ('*Ideen*'), which are born out of the free will and have influenced human conduct and our intentions during any particular historical period or era.

In a new methodological approach to history introduced by Karl Lamprecht, these ideas are denigrated as mere expressions of those material laws, which necessitated their creation in the first place.<sup>246</sup> Therefore Lamprecht's approach underlines the importance of what is the 'typical' and 'regularly observable' in history and not what is particular, outstanding and individual in history. This means that a certain period is not shaped by its crucial moments or historical figures, but by its underlining patterns and material driving forces, which the 'modern' historian should aim to uncover. This leads Meyer to the conclusion that history as an empirical 'science' deals with social groups, classes and

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<sup>242</sup> See *THEORIE* p. 3 Meyer refers here to his detailed remarks about this subject at the *Einleitung* ('*Anthropologie*') to his *Geschichte des Altertums* (*GdA*) vol. I.1. p. 189.

<sup>243</sup> See *THEORIE* p. 3.

<sup>244</sup> See *THEORIE* p. 4.

<sup>245</sup> *THEORIE* p. 4 f.

<sup>246</sup> See *THEORIE* p. 5 f.

societies. Thus, its objects proper 'are the human societies and their change'.<sup>247</sup> On this occasion we cannot analyse every aspect of the criticism which Meyer levelled against this approach. However, the account of 'empirical history', which regards itself as following the same methods as any descriptive natural science, emphasises the task to show the 'development of mankind'. In order to achieve this aim, the sociologists Barth and Bernheim (both contemporaries of Bücher and Meyer) divided human history into 'types of societies' in order to discover the 'principles, which dominated the development from an earlier society to a later one'.<sup>248</sup> Although Karl Bücher's methodological considerations are very rare, parallels to his theory of 'economic stages' become apparent. By referring to Lamprecht's stages in cultural history ('*Kulturgeschichte*'), Meyer argues that such simple formulae, including Bücher's theory of economic stages, try nothing more than to 'belittle the riches of human history! The lively personalities have been clubbed to death, and its place is taken by mere phantoms and vague generalisations'.<sup>249</sup> By referring to the modernistic spirit of his times, Meyer regrets that 'unfortunately our time is dominated by the drive towards keywords and by the delusion to know and to understand a phenomenon, if one simply throws about such keywords. We have experienced, and experience it still daily, how some political economists believe it to be legitimate to comprehend the secret of the historical development with the schema of the barter, money and credit economy and to bring it down to a single simple formula'.<sup>250</sup> Meyer's anger is not only directed against Lamprecht and Bücher, but also against the general tendency amongst the *Nationalökonomie* to oversimplify human history with the application of 'stages of economic development'.<sup>251</sup> This objection is directly linked to his previous methodological concerns about the universal nature of the deterministic and evolutionary world view à la Darwin and by materialists, such as Kautsky and Engels.<sup>252</sup> This theory, according to Meyer, carries a false but pervasive presupposition about the continuous social progress of the human civilisation - from primitive antiquity to the sophisticated and rationalised modernity.<sup>253</sup> However, Meyer's swift and categorical rejection of theories of the 'linear

<sup>247</sup> See *THEORIE* p. 5 f. Meyer quotes at this occasion the sociologist Paul Barth (1897) p. 4.

<sup>248</sup> See Barth (1897) p. 8 and Bernheim (1894) p. 5.

<sup>249</sup> *THEORIE* p. 9

<sup>250</sup> *THEORIE* p. 8.

<sup>251</sup> See Part I.1.ii.

<sup>252</sup> The belief that the human sciences work according to a similar methodological procedure as the natural sciences and that the world of human affairs according to Kautsky and Engels are indeed driven by evolutionary progress has been recently noted by Marriott (2000) p. 168 f.

<sup>253</sup> One may not conclude from this that Meyer did not acknowledge the diversity in these 'modern' accounts.

development of human society' did not have the desired impact on the social sciences, since such theories were never very popular amongst them anyway.<sup>254</sup>

Hegel's philosophy of universal history (*'Universalgeschichte'*), which is according to Meyer, 'rather postulates a certain state of mind', but not a theory of history<sup>255</sup>, and therefore 'does barely require any mention'<sup>256</sup> is also too swiftly dismissed. However, it seems that Meyer overlooked the fact that Hegel's notion of 'dialectical progress in history' is clearly distinct from materialistic and positivistic conceptions of 'linear development', which he criticised so heavily in his contemporaries.<sup>257</sup> However, the groundless polemic against Hegel perhaps originated in the popular rejection of Hegel's 'historical dialectic', which reached almost institutionalised forms amongst the historicist tradition before Meyer's scholarly career and may have therefore blurred his view.<sup>258</sup> From the context of the anti-Hegelian critique, it is conceivable that his main objection was bound up with Hegel's claim that every event and process whether recognised as significant or not by the historian is part of history. As we shall see below, Meyer argued exactly against the claim that any event or cause, no matter how unimportant and, to us, insignificant it may be, counts as historical (*'historisch'*). As a historicist, he rejected Hegel as well as the contemporary phenomenologist Wilhelm Dilthey, because both, according to Meyer, believed in the objectivity of a historical science in which laws aim to prove the existence of irremovable historical truth.<sup>259</sup> Although Meyer had faith in the omnipotence of scientific-rational thought analogous to the omnipotence of the natural sciences, laws and generalisations do not govern human history, and should therefore not concern the historian. Our actions and decision-making processes are rather part of human rationality, which does not remain secretive and hidden but is accessible by reason.

Although we may acknowledge that it was probably never Meyer's intention to formulate a comprehensive critique of the methods of alternative accounts to 'traditional historical studies'; Meyer blaming Hegel's and Darwin's ideas as largely responsible for having substantially fuelled the theoretical attacks of sociologists and economists in

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but they are not relevant here in order to map out Meyer's own account of the nature of history and its purpose. See *THEORIE* p. 3, 4.

<sup>254</sup> *WEdA* p. 88. This misreading of Bücher is still present in the contemporary literature about the controversy. See Parkins (1998) p. 234 f.

<sup>255</sup> *GdA* vol. I.1, 181f.

<sup>256</sup> *THEORIE* p. 6 n3.

<sup>257</sup> Demandt (1990) p. 162.

<sup>258</sup> See Part II.1-2.

<sup>259</sup> See Dilthey (1996).

Germany and Britain against the predominance of ‘traditional history’ is one-sided.<sup>260</sup>

Meyer directed his objections heavily against the fact that certain circles within ‘*Nationalökonomie*’ and ‘*Soziologie*’ started to employ and to reinterpret political and economic history in their attempt to equip themselves with a historic-theoretical groundwork by using an alternative view of history all together. This, however, is not to say that Meyer argued against Darwin’s theory of evolution in general.<sup>261</sup> Meyer objected to the application of Darwin’s evolutionary theory and Hegel’s concept of ‘*Universalgeschichte*’ in historical studies for yet another reason. According to Meyer, both scholars found representation in fashionable theories of class struggle à la Marx and in Lamprecht’s ideas about ‘the influential social units’, which in their ‘mass occurrences and their development’ would allegedly dominate the course of the nations, a theory to which we shall return in more detail in Part II.<sup>262</sup> Meyer’s main problem with these theories rests with the presupposition that the ‘particular individual’ is barely of any historical significance at all anymore and that the ‘historical subject’ is completely subsumed under the role of the masses in history. A ‘reorientation’ of historical studies of this kind, away from the individual and the ‘particular’, manifests itself in the ‘perverted’ task of the ‘modern’ historian to the study of mass-psychology,<sup>263</sup> or as Lamprecht expressed it, to study of ‘the social-psychological stages of development’.<sup>264</sup>

Diametrically opposed to Lamprecht’s putative laws of ‘mass-psychology’, Meyer’s own position is at first glance firmly rooted in the established tradition of German idealism à la Ranke and Kant. The Kantian influence on his philosophy came to light with the emphasis on the centrality of ‘free will’ (*freier Wille*) and ‘accident’ (*Zufall*) as a core notion of the historical enquiry.<sup>265</sup> Accident in history, for Meyer, is not to be understood as if a particular event did not have a cause. However, because of the fact that every action or event can be seen as being an effect and a potential cause at the same time, every human being faces the problem of reducing the occurrence of an event down to a finite number of causes. This is impossible for Meyer unless one reduces every event down to one ultimate and first cause: God, for instance. Yet this would only constitute a *prima facie* proof.

<sup>260</sup> See Näf in Calder III (1990) p. 285

<sup>261</sup> See *GdA* vol. I.1. p. 7 He acknowledges clearly its validity for the development of the human brain.

<sup>262</sup> *THEORIE* p. 7. The ‘Methodenstreit’ around Karl Lamprecht and its influence on the later course of the controversy are dealt with in Part II.3.ii.

<sup>263</sup> *THEORIE* p. 8.

<sup>264</sup> Lamprecht (1886/97) p. 8 cit. *THEORIE* p. 8.

<sup>265</sup> *THEORIE* p. 13 f.

Accident and free will undeniably have their place in human epistemology. As it was for Kant, Meyer also believed that man is capable of willing his own actions. The ability to will one's actions freely - the capacity of self-determination, is a proof of the epistemological existence of such a 'free will'.<sup>266</sup> In this way, the historian is not interested in the causes of actions or events but in reasons, which are not reducible to a single overpowering force. Yet this is not to say that Meyer would deny the existence of physical or 'ideological' determination of an event. This causal analysis, besides its validity and scientific attractiveness, is however not the nature of the historical explanation proper.<sup>267</sup> The historian's task is to give a teleological explanation; he seeks to grasp what a certain decision or event could have aimed at, and not primarily what caused it. Meyer's compatibilist view of the human will as both free and determined does not create a putative contradiction between accident and necessity, since they do not exist within the objects themselves. The latter are still subject to causality, but accident and necessity are properties of the categories, under which we subsume the particular phenomena ('*Erschreitung*').<sup>268</sup>

However, Meyer's analysis of the epistemological existence of 'free will' and 'accident' to which he devotes a good half of the *THEORIE* (pp. 5-34), appears elusive; in its quest to defend the fundamental importance of subjectivity and individuality in history it forms primarily a polemic against Lamprecht.<sup>269</sup> For Meyer one of the many examples used in order to elucidate the possibility of 'accident' and 'free will' as predominant and an epistemological necessity in history, is the outbreak of the Second Punic War. According to Meyer, the historian should not consider primarily external causes, but rather treat them as results of a conscious decision ('*Willensentschluss*').<sup>270</sup> Therefore, history deals with the analysis of the particular event; judging its importance by whether it had an impact on the world of human affairs, primarily politically but also culturally. Directed against his opponents Meyer argued that the 'first fundamental task of the historian is to ascertain the facts ('*Thatsachen*'), which once existed in reality. If he does not follow this task...if he does not know the particularities of the event...then his endeavour is non-representational...He might - and this case does happen perpetually - create the nicest and

<sup>266</sup> See *THEORIE* p. 14.

<sup>267</sup> See *THEORIE* p. 14.

<sup>268</sup> See *THEORIE* p. 17 f.

<sup>269</sup> A slightly more concise notion of 'accident' and 'free will' as being intuitively given to human understanding is discussed in *GdA* vol. I.1. p. 187.

<sup>270</sup> See *THEORIE* p. 17.

most profoundest theories and combinations...this all is of no worth whatsoever and leads the reader only astray into a world of fantasy, instead of into the real world'.<sup>271</sup>

Besides confining the primary task of the historian as basing his interpretation on the facts, Meyer lashes out once more against his opponents in the familiar guise of Karl Lamprecht and Karl Bücher. His accusations against them can be summarised under three points. First, to attempt to form generalisations about 'history life', which take a similar shape to the laws of natural sciences; laws can never be the object of history but only the precondition. Instead, 'the object of history is everywhere the enquiry and representation of the particular event' – 'the individual' (*das Individuelle*).<sup>272</sup> Secondly, that they sought to deny the 'predominant influence of accident and the will of the individual personalities...on the thoughts and views of the individual and the masses'.<sup>273</sup> Third, he complained that they aimed to 'postulate the dominant importance of mass phenomena, in particular economic 'laws', even though it is obvious that the whole economic development of wealth and the social shaping of a state or people (*Volk*) is dependent on political impulses'.<sup>274</sup> For Meyer, the main error lies in the 'the idea of monism in the scientific world-view' and secondly in the geographical and mass-psychological approaches.<sup>275</sup>

Meyer highlights instead that the centrality of the event forms the basis of *Ereignisgeschichte*, ('event history'), which consists primarily in the documentation of facts. However, from generation to generation, history would put an ever-increasing burden of facts upon mankind, facing us with the problem of handling its sheer quantity. This Kantian consideration played an important part in Meyer's interpretation of antiquity. Friedrich Nietzsche, who became popular at the turn of the century, suggested that history should only be pursued for the sake of its usefulness to our present situation and not as an end in itself. This would mean that the historian's task does not exhaust itself in the occupation of the archivist or the heraldic story writer, but also in the critical investigation of the particular worth or value of an event or fact for our present. Such an analysis can only take place if the historian himself possesses the correct historical worldview.<sup>276</sup> Meyer

<sup>271</sup> *THEORIE* p. 35.

<sup>272</sup> *THEORIE* p. 29.

<sup>273</sup> *THEORIE* p. 31.

<sup>274</sup> *THEORIE* p. 31.

<sup>275</sup> *THEORIE* p. 32.

<sup>276</sup> The concept of 'event history' '*Ereignisgeschichte*' was not invented by Meyer, but shows similarities with Nietzsche's concept of '*kritische Geschichte*' in his *Second Untimely Mediations* of 1874. Cf Demandt

argued that the selection of what is historically important involves directly the present interests of the historian in 'what was effective and influential.'<sup>277</sup> He understood too that the interests and value judgements of the historian also come into play in his interpretation of historical events.<sup>278</sup>

Immediately, the question comes to mind as to what kind of criteria should the historian apply in order to distinguish between what has been influential and what has been trivial or worthless? At this point Meyer's methodology faces substantial difficulties. 'The answer can only be taken from the present; its selection lies within the historical interests, which have some kind of an effect onto the present'.<sup>279</sup> Therefore, the starting point of the historical investigation has to be always the present, whereas the historical presentation starts with the earliest findings.<sup>280</sup> Yet Meyer shows openness as to what this field of interest may be, which may catch the historian's attention. 'Sometimes it's this, sometimes it's that', he says, 'which appears in the foreground, politics, religion, economic history, literature and art and so forth. An absolute norm does not exist'.<sup>281</sup> The only deterrent is therefore solely its effect on the particular present. At first glance it looks as if such a philosophy would create a scientific basis to allow any individual, state or nation to become the subject of historical investigation, however Meyer's whole endeavour runs into difficulties when he tries to assess which questions are important for the understanding of present. He wonders, since the future has not yet happened, how can we indeed assess which historical moments are able to enlighten us and which once may lead us on the wrong path? As for the historical personality, the historical event can be anything that the historian declares as important when determining the cause for a particular political decision made in the present. A historical tool such as this could be open to abuse and would not equip us with a standard to judge whether the historian has picked the 'right' events or not. However, Meyer does not allow for such an arbitrary and subjective selection, which would only lead into historical relativism. He argues that the 'more far reaching the circle of the effect of a particular historical event, the more important it is and the greater is the interest which we assign to it'.<sup>282</sup> Besides the great cultural-historical

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(1990) p. 159. Also see *THEORIE* p. 37.

<sup>277</sup> *THEORIE* p. 37. See also *GdA* vol. I.1. p. 188.

<sup>278</sup> *GdA* vol. I.1. p. 191.

<sup>279</sup> *THEORIE* p. 37.

<sup>280</sup> See *GdA* vol. I.1. p. 208 f.

<sup>281</sup> *THEORIE* p. 38.

<sup>282</sup> *THEORIE* p. 38.

phenomena, religion, literature, the political events including the character of political constitutions are what bear primarily a historical momentum or element. For Meyer, the latter have by nature a great impact on the structure and organisation of human social interaction. Since these interactions form the major part of human nature, the magnitude of political history dominates over all other aspects. It lies near to compare Meyer's view with Aristotle's thesis that 'the state is older than the human being', which does explain Meyer's faith in the all incorporating power of the nation state, defending the citizen's interests best.<sup>283</sup> The political always precedes the material, social or economical. For him the spirit of the past, previous political institutions and social forms, ideologies and scientific discoveries need still to operate in some form in our days. If they do so, they count as historically important. One may however not interpret Meyer's view as reading the idea and political constitution of the Prussian Nation State back into the political organisation of the Roman Empire as a whole. Instead, by highlighting the complexity of the particular forms of a 'nation' and 'nationhood' during different periods of antiquity, he is able to show how certain political decisions and forms have left their mark in one way or another in the present.<sup>284</sup> Although Meyer does not underestimate the importance of cultural, economic or religious events in human history, he emphasises that they are all only part of political history. However, if history is unable to give us any tool in order to make predictions about the future, what worth then does any historical inquiry have beyond the collection and representation of the facts? Is it, for example, historically more important that Friedrich Wilhelm IV rejected Germany's *Kaiser* crown, than the biography and social world of his tailor?<sup>285</sup>

Nevertheless, there has to be some standard by which the historian should judge the importance and the value of a historical event. However, in order to do so, one needs to have 'unified, historically substantiated *Weltanschauung*', from which the historian can judge the causes by knowing the effects.<sup>286</sup> Although this '*Weltanschauung*' is not systematically sketched out in the *THEORIE*, Meyer acknowledges the subjective character of the historical evaluation depending on the particular present period and its political

<sup>283</sup> *Pol.* III.4 [1276b37] f. See *GdA* vol. I.1. p. 9 f. It is worth noting that Meyer agreed with Aristotle's effort to explain the existence of the state out of the political nature of man, but Meyer surprisingly also accused Aristotle of not emphasising the importance and priority of the state enough. *GdA* vol. I.1. p. 15. This is to say, that not 'society' ('*Gesellschaft*') protects its citizens from cultural, racial, and linguistic decline, but it is rather the state ('*der Staat*') See *GdA* vol. I.1. p. 74 f.

<sup>284</sup> See *THEORIE* pp. 33-34.

<sup>285</sup> See *THEORIE* p. 37.

settings. Indications of what the 'freely willing' historian should consider in his analysis of what is historically important are however given and create a problem for the transparency of Meyer's philosophy of history.<sup>287</sup> He argues that such interest should be focused on those cultures which reached a higher standing; 'those which have an immediate effect on the present'.<sup>288</sup> Although it is not clear to which present Meyer refers to, 'the external and internal history of primitive cultures and some Negro kingdoms' seem not to be of historical significance, but could be perhaps of anthropological interest, he points out.<sup>289</sup> This is however not to say that those cultures can never be regarded as historically important. That they did not leave any significant traces in our present, is not to say that they never will be influential in the future. If they do so, then they become an 'object of historical interest and thereby a subject of historical investigation similar to the advanced civilisations (*'Culturvölker'*)'.<sup>290</sup>

In the same way as present conditions can never be an object of historical inquiry - they can only become such an object like any other object - mass-phenomena or personality of the past can only gain historical interest if they have a recognisable effect on present politics. That history could have followed any possible directions if only a certain event or personality would not have occurred, is of course possible but mere conjecture and worthless speculation. The 'great men' of history are, for Meyer, very rare and dependent on decision making and accident.<sup>291</sup>

For Meyer, the past can only come to light through the present, and the present is dominated by the past. 'The task of the historical genius is therefore to construct a parallelogram of forces correctly of which the diagonal i.e. what became, where one knows the nature and masses of the working forces and persons, and to abstract from those even where one does not know these forces exactly'.<sup>292</sup> Since antiquity takes the central place in Meyer's work, he was also fascinated with its great legacy. Therefore, the ancient civilisations are not just a stepping stone in the development of human cultures from the

<sup>286</sup> 23/05/1915 letter to Dove in Meinecke (1962) vol. IV 61f. See *THEORIE* p. 43.

<sup>287</sup> The word '*Weltanschauung*' finds hardly mentioning in the *Einleitung* (*GdA* vol. I.1.). Meyer seems to be using more frequently the less bold term '*wissenschaftliche Kritik*' (*GdA* vol. I.1. p. 208 f.)

<sup>288</sup> *THEORIE* p. 47.

<sup>289</sup> That Meyer aimed to sketch out the anthropology of whole development of mankind can perhaps be inferred from the ambitious aims set out in the *GdA* vol. I.1.

<sup>290</sup> *THEORIE* p. 47. Also Näf in Calder III (1990) p. 293, highlighted only the former point, which may give his readers the impression that Meyer somehow looked down on such cultures. This is in the extended context of Meyer's argument not true.

<sup>291</sup> *THEORIE* p. 52 f.

<sup>292</sup> Cit *THEORIE* p. 53 n3. The somehow puzzling quote has been Meyer taken from Kant's *Kritik der reinen*

primitive ancients to sophisticated modern mankind – which was the view many economists and sociologists held, according to Meyer. The spirit of the ancients, their personalities and events have influenced modern history and are noticeable in the ideas and political constitutions of the independent and coexisting nation states of Europe. However, Meyer does not idealise and transfigure the ancient world as a paragon for the modern cultures. Its downsides and failures are brusquely elucidated. In this way Athens is not only ‘the city to which we owe everything we possess in culture and education. Without it, we would still be Barbarians’,<sup>293</sup> but also, and more importantly, a showcase of modern Europe especially the Prussian-Germanic nations.<sup>294</sup> The possibility of comparing the modern present with the ancient past emerges from Meyer’s assumption that three factors interplay in the course of historical change. Firstly, the conscious decision-making of historical personalities. Secondly, the ideas dominating a certain epoch and third, the accidental events.<sup>295</sup> History does not only constitute the present, but also provides us with the experience and knowledge to shape the world according to our intentions and goals. History might express rational decision-making, but the capacity to exercise ‘free will’ does have an impact on how history changes in its course. In other words, what is certain about history is that it continues and that we can learn and benefit from the ‘great’ events and masters of the past. Yet to Meyer, the quest for the discovery of fundamental law, which governs all historical development of mankind, will always remain a pointless endeavour, since such a law is only an illusion and can therefore never be a subject of historical inquiry proper. Instead, history is subjectively coercive or accidental. All cultures have therefore their own fate in their hands and can change and shape its political surroundings within its limits.<sup>296</sup> The driving forces are however not the masses or the forces from below. In particular the idea of cultural and national identity and unity are to be considered powerful political ideas; realisable and enforceable only from ‘above’. This could perhaps provide a good reason as to why Meyer was highly patriotic and active in

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*Vernunft*. See *GdA* vol. I.1. p. 202 f.

<sup>293</sup> Cit. Demandt (1990) p. 162 n13.

<sup>294</sup> Demandt (1990) p. 162 argues that Meyer thought that the ‘fate’ of the Greek cultures forms only a smaller scale compared to the modern political situation. This however, does somehow belittle the point that besides all similarities and frequent comparisons, Meyer highlights also the fundamental differences between Hellas and modern Europe in particular with regard to the religious influence over the character of these nations.

See Meyer *GdA* vol. I.1. ch. 2.

<sup>295</sup> See *THEORIE* p. 53.

<sup>296</sup> See Meyer (1924) p. 1764.

gathering support during the Germany's 'defensive war'.<sup>297</sup> That certain historical events can perhaps teach us a lesson for our own fate; that certain aspects and preconditions in the shaping of the political life of modern times share similarities and links with events in antiquity and its peoples, is not the same as naively equating the two epochs with one another.

Meyer also emphasised that all historical critique 'demands a standard, which allows an objective criterion, or rather criteria. The first criterion lies in the general, always constant conditions of real life'.<sup>298</sup> Those conditions of what may have been externally possible or impossible should be investigated by the sciences. The second criterion applies to historical studies itself, to investigate what was psychologically possible and able to manifest itself. Any historical inquiry starts from the present perspective and is influenced by [present] conditions and opinions; 'the historical critique has the task of emancipating itself from them, to understand the past in its own conditions...therefore the historian has to place himself, and his thought processes into the past; he has to touch it and live in it. If done so, it becomes a reality and he can then begin to comprehend the events as if he would himself experience them'.<sup>299</sup> On the contrary, he maintained that 'every immersion into the past is always relative, since the observer can never escape the realm of his own present and his own individuality. He constantly carries these conditions with him no matter how hard he tries to control them through critical thinking'.<sup>300</sup> It seems indeed that Meyer appeals to the self-discipline and open-mindedness of the historian to develop a critical ability, but this is a fallacy. A historical subject of general interest like antiquity, which appeals to people of high intellectual standing because of its significance for our present use, is often commented upon by them solely on the basis of their 'common sense' and their 'experience'.<sup>301</sup> This is not to say that a historian is infallible. However, and this point is perhaps also directed against the sociological methodology, the expertise of the historian rests with his knowledge of the sources and his intuitive ability to envisage the causes of the historical event.<sup>302</sup> In order to present the historical details the historian himself can and should use any means at his disposal to create a lively picture of past

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<sup>297</sup> Even the liberal Wilamowitz called Meyer 'one of the bravest fighters for the honour of our Fatherland' (1925) p. 55ff.

<sup>298</sup> *GdA* vol. I.1. p. 305.

<sup>299</sup> *GdA* vol. I.1. p. 306.

<sup>300</sup> *GdA* vol. I.1. p. 307.

<sup>301</sup> *GdA* vol. I.1. p. 309.

<sup>302</sup> *GdA* vol. I.1. p. 309.

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events. This includes for Meyer that his imagination should flourish, but unlike the 'freely operating artistic fantasy of the poet, who created the object himself; it [the imagination] is rather bound up with the historical fact. It is therefore only allowed to recreate; it should awake once more the past into a lively object in our mind in order to show us how it really was'.<sup>303</sup> It is now clear how analogies and comparisons between past and present and the use of modern terminology should be understood in Meyer's works. The philosophical tradition and background of his views are examined in part II. However, even if Meyer's philosophy of history appears as a more sophisticated doctrine than admitted by modern authors such as Moses I. Finley, the reproach remains that the many loose ends in Meyer's doctrine create the impression that Meyer's theory 'is not fully consistent', as Mansfield phrased it delicately.<sup>304</sup>

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<sup>303</sup> *GdA* vol. I.1. p. 310.

<sup>304</sup> Mansfield (1990) p. 256.

*vii. Critique*

Meyer ended his *THEORIE* with a strong defence of the historicist historiography with '*Altertumswissenschaft*' as one of its main pillars. This follows clearly from Meyer's emphasis of the priority of the historical personality and the power of the historical occasion. Those decisions by the historic personalities are reported to us in the historic documents and reports. Hence, sociology, archaeology, geography or statistics have no place in ancient history since they differ fundamentally in method and object of enquiry. However, as we saw, Meyer's theoretical considerations are of an epistemological nature and address the question of what we should consider as historical knowledge. It is here that Meyer's 'philosophy of history' has its deepest difficulties.

We noted above that in particular the elucidation of the notion of 'free will' and 'accident', which form the central premises of his theory, are ambiguous and partly contradictory. This is particularly true of 'free will', for which Meyer acknowledges causal and ethical or teleological elements, but does not clearly distinguish between them. That is to say, Meyer seems to mix judgements of expediency. For example, if we describe Hannibal's tactics in defending Carthage during the Second Punic War (220-201 BC) as an art of warfare in order to achieve a certain political gain, then we make a value judgement about Hannibal's action from the perspective of the 'substantiated world view of the historian'. The former causal explanation based on hypothetical imperatives taken for itself has validity.

Confusion also grabs hold of the reader concerning Meyer's distinction of the 'individual', 'particular' or 'unique' in history in contrast to the historically 'general' or 'ordinary'. The latter does not attract great attention in Meyer's philosophy since it, allegedly, forms only the causal background for the appearance of the former, which is the more important historically. However, if the 'general' is seen as part of some kind of regular influence on the specific, particular event, then they must be considered as equally important to the historian. This would contradict the above distinction. Although elements of a holistic approach are visible in Meyer's analysis of which part of history is primarily important, he separates and disregards the elements of social cultural history instead of absorbing them into the all-encompassing priority of political history, which could soften and obliterate the narrow notion of 'political history'.

Ambiguous too is Meyer's definition of the object of history - 'what was effective and exciting'.<sup>305</sup> Here Meyer is clearly impressed by Ranke's attempt to create a historiographical method in order to show 'how it really was' (*wie es wirklich gewesen*). However, again it seems that Meyer does not distinguish clearly between what event had perhaps a real impact on other events, and what we may learn from this particular event or decision. This basically establishes the fundamental weakness in Meyer's approach, which has a lack of conceptual rigour in the distinction between causal and value analysis in history. It can therefore not come as a surprise that Meyer's 'historically substantiated world-view' lacks any limit as to how far the historian is entitled to use modern concepts and parallels in order to establish what we can learn from history. Max Weber noted in criticism of Meyer's method that his 'concept of the historical [*das Historische*]' as the effective [*das Wirksame*]' lacks any distinction between the "primary" historical object, which acknowledges the interests of the evaluating individual as being part of a particular cultural individualism, and, of a "secondary" historical fact, the cause, which influenced this individual as part of a causal regress'.<sup>306</sup> Hence, it is impossible to find any basis for an 'objective' notion of what was historically important. With Meyer, history remains subjective and cannot escape the realm of the judgements and values of the particular historian. Meyer did not see this as a serious problem, since he clearly universalised and patriotically highlighted the development of the ideas, personalities and political events which brought about and strengthened the 'independent Prussian-German nation state' and its constitutional rise.

A serious revision of his theory and a clear response to Weber's criticism are missing in the second edition of the *THEORIE*. Meyer only remarked laconically that 'Weber just spelled out what he thought anyway'.<sup>307</sup> However, a small shift towards the relation of historical studies and the elements of anthropology are admitted in the similarly entitled *Einleitung - Elemente der Anthropologie* to the 2<sup>nd</sup> edition of the *GdA* (vol. I.1 1907). Here he complains that some of his critics argued that his method was not modern enough and even backward. Such reactions could not deflect from the great appreciation and support Meyer's method received mainly from the later followers of the traditional historicist tradition. On the other hand, the majority of reviews mentioned in Marohl's Meyer bibliography focus mainly on historical detail - those concerned with

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<sup>305</sup> See *THEORIE* p. 36.

<sup>306</sup> Näf in Calder III (1990) p. 298.

methodological elucidation are rare.<sup>308</sup> Even if some younger historians, such as Lenschau and Croiset disagreed mildly with certain aspects of Meyer's theory, it was regarded as a methodological spearhead against the new methodological approaches introduced by Lamprecht and the historical materialists demanding a 'reorientation' of historical studies.<sup>309</sup>

Meyer's extensive use of modern terminology and the 'uncovering' of circles of the cultural development, which are peculiar to human civilisations have their roots in the object of history and the historic interests of the historian. However, not only does the premise of the priority of 'historical accident' and the 'free will' in history show serious deficiencies, but the theory of the cyclic development of civilisations deserves some critical attention as well.

In the *Einleitung* to the *GdA* he concludes the chapter on the 'Fundamentals of the historical development' by stating that 'all human life moves in between two tendencies, the out-balancing and the individualising tendency; their ever continuing conflict encapsulates the most inner essence of mankind. This antagonism is the basis that all human bonds (other than the animals) have a development ('*Entwicklung*') and therefore have a history. If ever one of these two tendencies would gain absolute power, be it the complete chaos of *bellum omnium contra omnes* (the war of all against all), or be it an absolute hegemony of a homogenous solely individualistic element that supersedes culture, a further development would not be possible anymore and humanity itself would be transformed into a race which is alien and indifferent to us'.<sup>310</sup> If now religion and spiritual development ('*geistige Entwicklung*') move or develop in between the very same tendencies, that of individuality with and against homogeneity, then it can be argued that the relationship between the individual and society, between state and its institutions etc. - the entire realm of human thought and civilisation moves along these tendencies.<sup>311</sup> The antagonism of mental and external, political and material factors create the historical idea, which the highest development of human individuality is able to embrace.<sup>312</sup> We know that Meyer rejected any claim that history operates according to laws. However, it is not clear

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<sup>307</sup> See Näf in Calder III (1990) p. 300, n23, n24.

<sup>308</sup> See Marohl (1941).

<sup>309</sup> Lenschau (1932) p. 88 and Croiset (1932) p. 22 f.

<sup>310</sup> *GdA* vol. I.1. p. 84.

<sup>311</sup> On the important aspect of religion in the Greek *polis* see (*GdA* vol. I.1. p. 157-161), on philosophy (*ibid.* pp. 163-64), science (*ibid.* p. 166 f.) and art (*ibid.* 172 f.).

<sup>312</sup> *GdA* vol. I.1. p. 182.

how significant external material factors are in the formation and perhaps partial determination of ideas. The logic of the circular economic development of cultures struggles with a contradiction. On the one hand, Meyer highlights the diversity of the development of ancient and modern cultures. He argues that ‘every culture and every one of its particular epochs...awaits the same fate, setting the limits, which cannot be exceeded. Whether it [the culture] fulfils its potentialities completely or not, which it has within these limits, this then depends on the accident that determines the particular events everywhere’.<sup>313</sup> On the other hand, he states that ‘every culture shows the means of its demise when it reached its zenith’.<sup>314</sup> If these means are peculiar to every culture, as Meyer believes, we could not go any further than to conclude with the platitude ‘that nothing in history lasts forever’. The problem is how can we draw parallels between particular epochs within particular cultures with one another, but we cannot compare cultures in general with one another. If the political whole of one culture is entirely different from another culture, how can its parts be comparable? Although Meyer frequently shows awareness of the dangers of inductive generalisation, it is problematic to maintain that all civilised cultures went through cultural circles driven by the eternal conflict of the antagonism between individuality and external material necessity. Is it really true that ‘every idea, as soon as it becomes reality, turns into its opposite, because not one thought is capable of grasping reality in its totality? This transformation (*‘Umschlag’*) of the idea is prominent in all the whole of historical life; the tragedy of history rests upon it’.<sup>315</sup> ‘This is how the circle of historical experience reoccurs again and again; however, in every particular case the individual composition (*‘Gestaltung’*) of creative human beings is different and therefore also the result of this composition. The internal unity as well as the eternal composition of history rests upon it’.<sup>316</sup>

Hence, it is clear that Meyer did not argue that antiquity is the same as the modern age entirely and that he did not abuse antiquity for mere vested political interest. However, we must highlight that Meyer made extensive use of the ‘analogy’ as a means to make historical conclusions.<sup>317</sup> With the analogy, he points out, ‘we try to grasp the external

<sup>313</sup> Meyer (1924) p. 1764.

<sup>314</sup> Näf in Calder III (1990) p. 307 f.

<sup>315</sup> Meyer mentions examples of such a constant rise and decline in the development and demise of particular religions, the emergence of Greek freedom and its destruction by Alexander the Great etc. *GdA* vol. I.1 p. 182 f.

<sup>316</sup> *GdA* vol. I.1. p. 183.

<sup>317</sup> *GdA* vol. I.1. p. 203.

forces, which have influenced the '*Gestalt*' of an event, but also the inner psychological moments, which have brought about particular political circumstances in order to understand 'individuality in its totality'.<sup>318</sup> Meyer argues that the analogy is made when we infer a general tendency from a particular action and apply it to other events. Meyer is well aware of the dangers of using the analogy as a means of historical studies too. He asserts that 'we also stand very near the limits of what is still scientifically legitimate about induction. The analogy should only be used carefully as an assisting means for the real task, the portrayal of the historical facts in their becoming and effectiveness'.<sup>319</sup> However, this does not solve the problem of how far a resemblance can be realistically applied and used appropriately. As we have seen, Meyer's analogies are not always chosen with great sensitivity and are by no means free from emotive language. Even if most of his exaggerated comparisons between America and Rome, for example, are to be found in his political papers, expertise and self-discipline, which he demands from his colleagues, are not always met by himself. It also seems that the 'historical method' and the 'historical critique' are intuitively given to the historian's perception making certain events stand out as significant *per se*. In order to perceive these events as crucial and significant, Meyer argues the historian just has to imagine the past and study the facts hard enough.<sup>320</sup> If this is indeed the precondition for historical expertise and critical ability then it is really not clear as to why scholars like Lamprecht and Bücher should not hypothesise over the nature of ancient 'economic' life. Both were also well-trained historians and certainly did not indiscriminately create their theories of economic development. Also if history is always subjective as frequently maintained, how can the enlightened, well-trained, careful and open-minded historian ever know how it really was? If Meyer would argue that every historian should make up his own mind about the prominence of historical events, why bother arguing against the contrary position, which does not so much dispute the historical facts but rather their interpretation. Regarding the 'objective standards' or criteria of historical investigation, Meyer does not acknowledge that even the natural sciences like geology and archaeology can never be completely objective. What is possible or impossible changes with new findings and with potential paradigm shifts within these sciences.<sup>321</sup> This applies also to 'chronology', which forms the basis of any historical

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<sup>318</sup> *GdA* vol. I.1. p. 303.

<sup>319</sup> *GdA* vol. I.1. p. 304.

<sup>320</sup> *GdA* vol. I.1. p. 304.

<sup>321</sup> Thomas Kuhn has pointed out that the value judgements and prejudice of the scientist himself influence

investigation.<sup>322</sup>

Meyer's philosophy of history carries a fundamental contradiction at its core. On the one hand, he highlights the centrality of the subjective character of history. On the other hand, he continues to believe in the existence of a self-evident rationalism, which allows the historian to grasp the historically 'outstanding' and influential events. Secondly, he tries to unite the 'general' and 'individual' in history. However, it is then not clear why the predominance or driving force in the historical process remains the idea, which manifests itself in Meyer's emphasis and support for the creative individual, the predominant political ideas in their concurrence and discord with a particular political system of a powerful but individuality-preserving state. Meyer insists that the historian ought to judge his subject matter from the present, from those concepts and views which are at his disposition. It attempts to be universal, but excludes certain cultures, at least for the time being. It emphasises the superiority of the European cultures against 'lower' cultures, the priority of the political ideas and constitutions against social and material factors.<sup>323</sup> Modern nationalism and ancient nationhood was one of the most noble and creative ideas for one of Germany's most famous and well-established ancient historians, who aimed to expose and warn against the modern connection between democracy and capitalism in dramatic pictures taken from the ancients.<sup>324</sup> This section comprehensively explains Meyer's parallels and analogies in detail, but we have also cast serious doubts about the methodological legitimacy and argumentative coherence of his stance.

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the interpretation of the findings and the results of the scientific inquiry. See Kuhn (1996) p. 29 f. Therefore, at times of revolution, when the normal scientific tradition changes, the scientist's perception of his environment must be re-educated. In some familiar situations he must learn to see a new gestalt. After he has done so the world of his research will seem, here and there, incommensurable with the world he had inhabited before'. Kuhn (1996) p. 112 f.

<sup>322</sup> See *GdA* vol. I.1 p. 234 f.

<sup>323</sup> See Näf in Calder III (1990) p. 309. Näf also adds here the 'exclusion of the disdained masses' in Meyer's philosophy, which in the light of Meyer's political writings goes however too far.

<sup>324</sup> Kaerst (1925) p. 219.

### 3. Karl Julius Beloch - Demography and the Capitalist Character of the Ancient Polis

#### *i. Biographical Note*<sup>325</sup>

Karl Julius Beloch (1854-1929) was born as the son of a lord of the manor in Nieder-Petschkendorf (Prussia). Due to a mixed marriage Beloch's background was semi-aristocratic. Becoming a land owner or a university professor was for him the only true ambition worth pursuing in order to be his own free man. His main interests in his studies were political history, geography and statistics. Philology and classical languages, however, were not his strength and never excited him. Beloch dismissed these subjects as 'mere memory stuff'.<sup>326</sup> Due to bronchitis, Beloch chose to spend more time in the mild climate of the Italian Mediterranean mostly in Sorrento.

In 1872 Beloch started his studies in classics at Palermo. A year later he went to Rome where he began to enjoy life for the first time, even though he felt that there was little to learn, since ancient history at that time was in a desolate state.<sup>327</sup> Beloch turned his attention instead to the museums, galleries and the archaeological library where he studied epigraphs and inscriptions. He became acquainted with Bartolomeo Capasso, who drew Beloch's attention towards the topography of ancient Athens. A year later, after moving to Rome, he became influenced by the works of the ancient historian Ronghi, the linguist Lignana, the epigraphist de Ruggiero and attended lectures and seminars at the German Archaeological Institute of Rome.<sup>328</sup>

According to Beloch's autobiographical reflections, his PhD at Heidelberg was not so much a matter of academic pride, but rather that he knew that without it he would have difficulty in being taken seriously in academic circles. Karl Christ inferred from this that 'the development of his strong ego might have been influenced by the fact that Beloch reacted throughout his life very sensitively if his works were not acknowledged and

<sup>325</sup> Beloch disliked engaging into manual labour and rather believed that the 'ordinary chap' should carry out activities of this kind. In his autobiographical reflections we hear that 'manual labour 'as recommended by education scholars and as it was forced onto me in the past, was never my lust nor my skill....I never understood how it should benefit us, us who belong to the leading class'. Beloch (1925) p. 4

<sup>326</sup> 'As long as the Greeks were independent they never learned any foreign languages and still they were great guys'. Beloch (1925) p. 2.

<sup>327</sup> Beloch (1925) p. 6.

suffered from the fact that the ‘Ragazzi capitolini’ at the Institute looked down on him’.<sup>329</sup> He graduated from Heidelberg in 1875 with a distinction. Aged only twenty-five Beloch became an extraordinary professor of ancient history at Rome, where he maintained his post until 1912.

His major academic achievements during his stay in Rome was the *Griechische Geschichte* (completed in 1913) and his early work *Die Bevölkerung der Griechisch-Römischen Welt* (1886) earned him a distinguished international reputation and both studies influenced the direction of ancient history during the early 20<sup>th</sup> century significantly. This achievement rests not so much on his often rather impassioned treatment of Karl Bücher’s or Karl Rodbertus’ ‘oikos economy’, but more with his efforts to involve creatively new methodological tools and approaches such as demographic surveys and socio-geographical statistics in ancient Greek and Roman history.<sup>330</sup> In 1912 Beloch went to Leipzig to take up a chair of ancient history, where Bücher, Lamprecht and also Georg von Below held professorships in political economy and modern history. His acceptance of the offer had however nothing to do with the controversy between Meyer and Bücher, which had, in a narrower sense, already ended with Bücher’s reply in the *ZGW* of 1902. It is more likely that Beloch was dissatisfied with the progress on his academic research on the *Griechische Geschichte*, which had slowed down due to an increase in administrative and teaching duties, and secondly that Leipzig enjoyed a great reputation in political economy, history, philosophy and other humanities disciplines.<sup>331</sup>

Like many of his fellow German historians, Beloch developed a dedicated passion for politics and for German patriotism. However, whilst the Prussian School swore loyalty to Bismarck and the aristocracy, Beloch maintained that he himself stood always on the side of the parliamentarians. Even if he felt he had not yet fully understood politics during his younger years, he had already seen with disgust ‘how Bismarck kicked the rights of the people, and I have not forgiven him for this even to this day. I always regarded freedom as the highest good and remained throughout my life a republican’. Beloch’s republicanism was not unlike the social democratic type. ‘A republic under Freidrich Ebert in which

<sup>328</sup> See Momigliano (1966) p. 3.

<sup>329</sup> Christ (1972) p. 250. This judgement might not be quite accurate. Beloch was only concerned to be able to live ‘decently’ in this academic circle. Beloch (1925) p. 7.

<sup>330</sup> The use of statistics as an enrichment for ancient political history becomes already aparent in one of his early word. ‘The Italian alliance under Rome’s Hegemony - public legal and statistical inquireies’ (1880). See also the appriciative comments by Lehmann-Haupt (1930) p. 103 f. .

<sup>331</sup> Beloch (1925) p. 15 f. It took him 7 years to complete the first volume of this work in 1909, but Beloch

socialists and Jews are in control was nothing I ever wanted. But even this political order was still better than the feudal lord state and the two dozen monarchs, who fled in the most disgraceful way from their little thrones after they led our nation into catastrophe'.<sup>332</sup> Perhaps his forty-year long marriage to Bella Bailey, whose father was a personal friend of Lincoln, Seward and Sumner influenced Beloch in his anti-establishment standpoint, which was not always strictly anti-aristocratic.<sup>333</sup>

Beloch's professorship at Leipzig also did not last for long. Due to the illness of his wife he was forced to return to Rome after only one semester.<sup>334</sup> The dramatic events in the months and years ahead, the erratic political decision-making of the Italian government during the World War saw Beloch losing his professorship at the Institute, his villa and most sadly his wife. Never having been able to participate long and intensely enough in the political affairs of his fatherland, was something Beloch regretted deeply in almost an Aristotelian fashion that this highest good for man, to participate in political affairs, was somehow denied to him. Nevertheless, he expressed his hope and faith that the German people will always remember about themselves that 'the God, who let iron grow did not want slaves', which emphasises his patriotism.<sup>335</sup>

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did never despise the academic teaching burden.

<sup>332</sup> Beloch (1925) p. 16 f.

<sup>333</sup> Beloch (1925) p. 9 f.

<sup>334</sup> The title of his inaugural speech at Leipzig in autumn 1912, 'The Census of population as Factor and Indicator of the Historical Development', illustrates that Beloch seemed to have moved further towards the statistical method than the traditional historiography of the Prussian School would ever have found acceptable: See Beloch (1913b).

<sup>335</sup> Beloch (1925) p. 27. On the subject of Antisemitism before the 1930s see very recently Lindemann (2000)

## ii. *Demographic Analysis and Large Scale Industry in Classical Antiquity*

In the foreword to Beloch's first major work *Die Bevölkerung der Griechisch Römischen Welt* of 1880, he points out that economic history as a science was just about to emerge and that historical demography had never been dealt with in a scientific manner.<sup>336</sup> Beloch's work was a very ambitious undertaking to combine the latest modern statistical methods with the materials ancient historians usually dealt with. Beloch had to admit many years later that he himself in this early work, *Die Bevölkerung*, had not processed the scarcely available statistical sources critically enough. Nevertheless, a first attempt was made to move away from pure political history, which dominated the historical scholarship in Germany.<sup>337</sup> Unlike Meyer, Beloch placed less importance on the role of the individual in history, 'the great men' and so on, without intending to deny the importance of the political and ideological factors. Beloch maintained that the economic and the spiritual development in history are influencing each other and did not simply assigned priority to political and demographic factors. Beloch recognised that changes in 'spirit and collective consciousness expressed in our actions, do change the social environment'.<sup>338</sup> On the other hand, man's social life is not strictly dominated or strongly led by single historic personalities. They play for Beloch a rather less significant role in the course of these processes.<sup>339</sup> Indeed only in the field of fine art Beloch ascribes the individual more or less an unlimited historical importance. His understanding of the historical development as a result of material and economic conditions and processes are primarily responsible for political changes. At this point one may interpret Beloch's rudimentary methodological concerns as being influenced by Marx's ideas of social development on the basis of economic conditions and class struggle. This perhaps becomes apparent when we consider the following observation as an exemplar: 'if the conditions for scientific discovery or a technological invention are once present, then this innovation will be made, whether by Hinz or by Kunz does not matter at all'.<sup>340</sup> However, this somewhat ironic comment concerning the influence of historical personalities has nothing to do with a materialistic or

<sup>336</sup> Beloch (1880) p. 1.

<sup>337</sup> Beloch (1925) p. 14.

<sup>338</sup> Beloch (1913a) I p. 308 ff.

<sup>339</sup> Beloch (1913a) I p. 1 f.

<sup>340</sup> Beloch (1913a) I p. 3. Such a view remained not unscrutinised, since it stood against Burckhardt's and Ranke's assumption about the effectiveness of the single individual in a historical process. Cf. Otto (1905) p. 701. Hinz and Kunz are aliases for 'Joe Public'.

dialectic view of historical development. Beloch categorically rejected any connection of his philosophy of history with Marx's historical materialism.<sup>341</sup> Similar to Hobbes and Mill, Beloch reinterpreted all human actions as being motivated by utility or usefulness (desire satisfaction).<sup>342</sup> An explanation for Beloch's disregard for historic personalities and the power of the underprivileged masses can perhaps be found in his personality, which shows certain signs of eccentric attitude towards his environment.<sup>343</sup> Another example for the importance of economic or demographical factors over the spiritual is the structure of his main work *Griechische Geschichte*, which deals with the economic history prior to the cultural aspects of the ancients' life.

Although *Die Bevölkerung* aimed to give a systematic account and an evaluation of the scarce and differentiated statistical findings beyond historical transcripts, especially this data evaluation was marked by significant overestimation, which sparked controversy not only amongst ancient historians but also under political economists. For example, Beloch assumed that during the classical period the Greeks were a nation of over eight million, which allowed them to outnumber other smaller nations in military conflicts. Hence, he concluded that this allowed the Greeks to play a more dominant military and cultural role in antiquity.<sup>344</sup>

Beloch assumed that the absolute number of citizens in a state is an expression of the political power of such a state. To him, the relative number compared with other cities is a wealth indicator and 'expresses the economic stage which a country has achieved', given that the fertility of the land and the access to essential raw materials is fairly similar.<sup>345</sup> Demographic statistics and its related modern methods had been ignored and neglected by both historians and statisticians in their relevance to ancient history, according to Beloch. He tries to illustrate this by claiming that statistical and numerical considerations already played an important part for the Romans and during the Middle Ages. Hans Delbrück's *Military History* is praised for emphasising the 'fundamental role of the numerical strength of the troops.'<sup>346</sup> He rather stressed that 'the size of the population of a country is nothing else but a product of historic and economic factors; and where we

<sup>341</sup> See Beloch vol. 1.1. (1913a) p. 4. Beloch discusses the problem of the personality in history extensively and argues against both sides, materialism and 'the naïve historiography that only acknowledges heroes: the masses that stand behind them are not worth considering'.

<sup>342</sup> See Hobbes' *Leivathan* (1996) I.6.2 p. 40 f. and Mill's *Utilitarianism* (1997) p. 169 ff.

<sup>343</sup> See Christ (1972) p. 264. See also the introduction to his *Griechische Geschichte* (1913).

<sup>344</sup> Beloch (1913b) p. 321 f.

<sup>345</sup> Beloch (1913b) p. 322.

know the factors, there we can account for the product'.<sup>347</sup>

Even though Beloch's aim was to substantiate the basis for 'a history of the population of Europe' and his *Bevölkerungsgeschichte Italiens* may have been an important step towards this goal - a book which assigned major significance to the demographic changes as an expression of the political and economic development.<sup>348</sup> However, Beloch admitted himself, that his pioneering studies could only approximately state the data correctly. He even admitted error margins of more than 25 % amongst the accounting of ordinary citizens and even more than 50 % in the number of slaves.<sup>349</sup> Beloch attempted to deliver a statistical basis of '*Minimalzahlen*' (a basic set of numbers of minimally reliable data) but also admitted that 'every so often I might have aimed too high,...However, all in all, one would not estimate the population of antiquity considerably lower, as I have done it'.<sup>350</sup> Any scepticism against Beloch's method, which he never fully discussed in great detail, is brushed aside as 'the general phrases with which the non-believers want to fob us off...is nothing more than scientific cowardice. It only proves that those who hold this view have not deeply thought about this matter'.<sup>351</sup>

Beloch may have carefully listed and organised the material in demographic movements and may have indeed inferred some military and 'cultural economic' strength of Hellas, but we may wonder whether the application of modern concepts such as heavy and large-scale industry are not just based on total conjecture and have even less credibility and reliability than a weather forecast. However, this does not refute Beloch's argument. One could argue, as he implicitly did, that having an unreliable forecast or estimation over the population and its demographic development is still better than having none whatsoever. The main error lies elsewhere.

Although we have to grant Beloch that he did not jump unfoundedly and immediately to conclusions about the compatibility of ancient and modern economic life, his works from 1900 onwards show an almost indiscriminate use of modern terminology in his descriptions of the classical period and beyond. Criticism did not only come from Bücher, but also from amongst his own ranks in ancient history. For example, Otto Seeck, a pupil of Theodor Mommsen, attacked Beloch's *Bevölkerung* as a conjectural statistics and

<sup>346</sup> See Beloch (1913b) p. 323. See also Delbrück (1911) vol. 1 p. 37 f.

<sup>347</sup> Beloch (1913b) p. 325.

<sup>348</sup> See Beloch (1937-61).

<sup>349</sup> See Momigliano (1966) p. 6.

<sup>350</sup> Beloch (1897) p. 343 f.

<sup>351</sup> Beloch (1913b) p. 324 ff.

concluded that ‘hence, he hovers in free air over the solid grounds of the tradition, and with him play clouds and wind’.<sup>352</sup> Seek argued that besides Beloch’s respectable efforts to collect all the relevant statistical sources, his lack of methodological clarity in the interpretation of sources, which every historian should possess, became apparent.<sup>353</sup> Although Seek’s assertion was generally justifiable, Beloch merely replied that the former criticism did not even ‘*locket einen Hund hinter den Ofen hervor*’ (‘entice a dog to come out from behind the oven’).<sup>354</sup>

Beloch was generally lauded by his contemporaries for delivering ‘for the 7<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> century BC a differentiated and clear picture of the substantial changes in the economic life. He also acknowledged the start of the money economy and its consequences’.<sup>355</sup> Such appreciative observations are certainly correct with regard to Beloch’s systematic rigour and detailed knowledge of almost all aspects of ancient history. However Beloch left us in the dark about the nature of such a ‘money economy’ and the nature of the ‘economic’ during the Homeric period.

Beloch’s demographical and statistical inferences are based on a further assumption that the ancient thinkers, in particular the philosophers, had little awareness of the ‘economic’ conditions and demographic structure that was present even in ancient times. ‘Böckh’s *Staatshaushaltung der Athener* was completely written in vain for them’.<sup>356</sup> However, he also acknowledged that ‘all cultural progress is in its last instance progress of knowledge’.<sup>357</sup> This is certainly acknowledged by Beloch with regard to the appreciation of the works and the influence of Demokrit, Epicur and Aristotle. However, just because they had little to say about the ‘economy’ is not proof that the classical period was economically essentially like the modern economy.<sup>358</sup>

However, the analysis of any possible problem of ‘propagating traditions’ is not addressed in earnest by Beloch. He only pointed out laconically that ‘every tradition has to be critically backed-up. The most influential traditions must do so most rigorously,

<sup>352</sup> Seek cited in Christ (1972) p. 258.

<sup>353</sup> Seek did not only provoke Beloch, he displeased also Meyer in his attempt to explain the collapse of the Roman Empire by referring to a misleading concept of ancient history of a reversed Darwinian selection according to which the best were extinguished and the weak and faint hearted survived. See Meyer’s *WEdA* p. 145. - -

<sup>354</sup> Beloch (1897) p. 343.

<sup>355</sup> Christ (1972) p. 266 f.

<sup>356</sup> Beloch I (1913a) p. 94.

<sup>357</sup> Beloch II.1 (1913a) p. 221.

<sup>358</sup> See Meikle (1995b) p. 148 f.

because we are far too easily caught up by authority'.<sup>359</sup> This is perhaps why Beloch did not rate classical philology very highly. Indeed his hostility towards those scholars is clearly brought out in the *Greek History*: 'the philologist believes what is mentioned in the sources until one proves to him that it is wrong; the historian believes in it only if it is proven that it is correct...Philology simply reports the contents of sources, whereas the historian should stand above his material, make guesses about the connection of those sources, but also doubts their integrity. The historian should discover what event caused a certain other event'. This is in Beloch's philosophy a process of 'climbing up' to the causes.<sup>360</sup>

We shall discuss the questionability of such statements below. For the moment we shall consider Meyer's and Beloch's terminological problems. By using terms such as 'heavy industry', 'world trade' and 'inflation' did Beloch draw such convenient parallels indiscriminately? It is fairly safe to say that we have good reason to believe, as Beloch did over a hundred years ago, that Athens around 329 BC had to import corn despite the absence of a drought or a plague. Beloch however claims that, for example, Kleomenes of Naukratis' corn speculations were responsible for an inflationary increase in its price, and that the very same type of speculations were occurring at the City exchequer of London. This is a parallel difficult to support.<sup>361</sup> We could argue that someone exploiting their position of power to make the wealthy and themselves even more prosperous by leaving the ordinary man out of pocket, is indeed what nowadays characterises a capitalist form of behaviour. The London exchequer however, was already an institutionalisation of the market economy with a separately operating and highly influential financial sector. The Athenian historians and philosophers did not report on the existence of such a vibrant community of speculators even on a smaller scale. The moneylender or shopkeeper who may have sold his produce primarily to earn more money was not organised in a guild which shaped the *polis* politics to suit their trade.

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<sup>359</sup> Beloch II .1 (1913a) p. 74 ff.

<sup>360</sup> Beloch I (1913a) p. 15 f.

<sup>361</sup> Cf. Beloch (1885) p. 260 f.

### iii. Bücher's 'Fallacy'

Beloch raised his concerns against Bücher's thesis after the publication of the second edition of *EdV* in 1895. Like Meyer two years before, Beloch's complaint targeted Bücher's apparently central premise 'that during the whole of antiquity and until the early middle ages, the objects of daily use were not subject to a regular exchange'.<sup>362</sup> Beloch and Meyer both agreed in principle that this claim is by all means acceptable for the Homeric period, but not for the classical period. Bücher claimed in a short article in 1884 'that one has to arrive at an exaggeration of the scope of ancient trade if someone does not use a quantitative method'.<sup>363</sup> Beloch attempted to satisfy Bücher's request in order to show that the ancient economy at least quantitatively can show parallels with the 'modern' economy, as Beloch defined it.

It is in this response to Bücher where historians, both then and now, often become perplexed. Out of nothing emerges an exchange rate between the Greek Talente and the German *Reichsmark*. According to some unsubstantiated data, the commodity tax of Peiraeus was 2 % of all imported and exported goods added up to 30 to 400 Talentes. This number is then used to calculate to a total trade of this city. Although Beloch repudiated Böckh's *Staatshaushaltung* earlier as out-dated he proudly notes that even the latter author has calculated in the same way.<sup>364</sup> By comparing ancient and modern silver values, Beloch ends up with a total trade value of 11 million *Reichsmark*. Taking inflation and currency devaluation into account, Beloch calculates 40 million RM for Peiraeus. Together with Beloch's demographical survey he concludes that the economic strength of Attica per citizen was not of the scale of Hamburg as a centre of modern world trade, but only of Denmark in the early 1890s. Given the economic depression, which Beloch observes for the period around 400 BC 'there can be no doubt that the trading transactions of Attica are far lower than modern industrial centres'.<sup>365</sup> The example is to show that Beloch's objections against Bücher do not lie with the latter's methodology, at least not at this point. Beloch took issue with Bücher's denial and claim of negligibility of trade for consumption and production purposes. 'Should we really believe that a family of five did spend per annum around 1000 Marks on luxury items during a period where Athens was

<sup>362</sup> See again *EdV* p. 81 (1997) 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. *EdV* (1906) 5<sup>th</sup> ed. p. 85.

<sup>363</sup> See Beloch (1899) p. p. 626 n1.

<sup>364</sup> Beloch (1897) p. 627 n1.

economically on its knees. With a daily wage for unskilled labour of 1 ½ - 2 Marks?'<sup>366</sup> Beloch's long-winded example shows clearly that with regard to the classical period he simply questioned Bücher's observation that in antiquity only luxury items were traded on a large scale. Beloch therefore does not engage in a methodological discussion of Bücher's theory of economic stages, but takes his opponent's observations as a fact of economic history, which Bücher explicitly wanted to avoid. The purely economic performance of Hellas overall is not compared with any modern state or territory because of the absence of a unified tax system. Regarding the economic strength of antiquity, Beloch is more optimistic in the developments towards the 1<sup>st</sup> century AD. Here he argues that Vespasina's Roman Empire was only limping 30 percent behind Europe of 1835. 'Hardly any other fact is more suitable in order to gain an understanding about the grandiosity of the world trade in antiquity'.<sup>367</sup>

Beloch's short paper does not, of course, go into detail as to how the whole course of trade in antiquity progressed. He always tried to point out that his estimations were incomplete and had large error margins. However, we do not need to criticise Beloch from a modern point of view that we may have more accurate numbers nowadays. It is the principle or methodology with which we have to take issue. Beloch's exchange rate and currency devaluation presume compatibility between the ancient world and the modern capitalist economy of Europe. We clearly see that he is only willing to admit a quantitative difference between the ancient and the Western civilisation. His further contributions to the Bücher-Meyer Controversy seem to underline this.<sup>368</sup>

Two further publications which are included in the Finley collection deal directly with Bücher's 'closed household economy'.<sup>369</sup> In his article 'On Greek Economic History' (1902) Beloch opposes Bücher's predecessor Karl Rodbertus for arguing that the ancient *polis*, due to its ethical omnipotence, demanded more political engagement from its citizens than the modern state in Beloch's time did.<sup>370</sup> He argues that Rodbertus was wrong to believe that the *polis* of classical Greece, in particular during peaceful times, demanded

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<sup>365</sup> Beloch (1897) p. 628.

<sup>366</sup> Beloch (1897) p. 629 f.

<sup>367</sup> Beloch (1897) p. 631. Titus Vespasianus Flavius (9-79), founder of the Flavian dynasty.

<sup>368</sup> A further example for Beloch's lack of awareness for the difference in the social and political character of antiquity and modernity is also his calculation of the balance of trade in Athens around 400 BC, which he equates with Denmark around 1890 (250 Krone). See Beloch (1899a) p. 628. The whole article is filled with conjectural comparisons.

<sup>369</sup> See Beloch (1899) and Beloch (1902).

<sup>370</sup> See Rodbertus (1864) p. 346.

heavy taxes and material contributions or military conscription. Beloch maintained that during 'normal times' the Greek *polis* demanded significantly smaller contributions than the German State did. Even with 'the execution of their polemical rights, the citizen of the ancient *polis* took it like us and displayed the same apathy in political matters as the modern man. Although everyone could go to public meetings, in reality only a few attended, unless something very important was put on the agenda'.<sup>371</sup> Two observations come to mind: firstly, Beloch would have to define what he meant by 'normal times'. Peace, material and political stability was never a given reality. Secondly, it cannot be surprising that an essentially aristocratic and imperialist orientated state like Germany around 1900 demanded great sacrifices from its citizens for its world political ambitions. With regard to the ancients' apathy, one could cynically answer that indeed nothing may have changed since then and that Beloch himself should not be bitter about the lack of interest which his own electorate showed in his excursions into local politics.

A third argument is based on Rodbertus's and Bücher's premise that slave labour dominated the production on the large-scale *latifundi* of the Roman empire. In opposition Beloch states that slavery was only occasionally and in 'industrial' cities predominant, 'but even here the slave population never exceeded half of the total population'.<sup>372</sup> Instead large groups of free craftsmen characterised the production of commodities, which were, to a great degree, designed to be sold. Beloch's position is in this respect diametrically opposed to Bücher's, who claimed in the *EdV* that in 'the ancient civilisation until the early Middle Ages, artefacts of daily use were not subject to a regular exchange'.<sup>373</sup> Rodbertus and Bücher's alleged misjudgement was, as previously maintained by Meyer, blamed on the predicament that neither was sufficiently trained in the profession of ancient history and philology. This is surprising, because as we have seen, Beloch regarded the former guild highly, including the cultural historian Karl Lamprecht for whom he had great respect.<sup>374</sup>

Beloch believed that he had discovered a fundamental problem in Bücher's work. On the one hand, Bücher tries to construct a 'primitive' picture of classical antiquity and beyond. On the other hand, Beloch noted a shift in Bücher's theory in his own position and claimed that Bücher believed that the main commodity traded in antiquity was the human

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<sup>371</sup> Beloch (1902) p. 95 ff.

<sup>372</sup> Beloch (1902) p. 96 f.

<sup>373</sup> *EdV* 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (1897) p. 81.

<sup>374</sup> Beloch (1925) p. 22.

being.<sup>375</sup> For Beloch it is rather absurd that someone like Bücher, who assumed such a limited scope of exchange in antiquity, could ascribe to the belief of large-scale slavery, and even tourism, to antiquity in order to explain the movements of people circa 400 BC. It is highly unlikely for Beloch that about 60,000 people between 401-399 travelled to Athens for mere pleasure or even for study purposes. He states that ‘almost no one travelled during Alexander’s times for the purpose of pleasure, for the purpose of studying very few; those who travelled, travelled in business affairs, hence mainly for trade’.<sup>376</sup> The assertion is correct, but unsurprisingly Beloch can only think of one reason for travelling, that of commerce. Beloch’s conjectural account of historical explanation becomes also apparent in the following statement: ‘An important, export geared industry is led by itself towards the large-scale industrial plant, and we have to assume this for Greek antiquity too, even if nothing would have been testified about this’.<sup>377</sup>

In many ways, Beloch’s view on the modern character of the ancient economy is even more outspoken than Meyer’s, but is methodologically closer to Bücher’s. Only for the times of the Homeric Sagas, is all kind of productive and industrial activity rather ‘primitive’.<sup>378</sup> Primitive, however, does not mean self-sufficient, associated with no trade and commerce etc. Contrary to Meyer, Beloch claims that the state of the ‘closed household economy’ cannot even be applied strictly to the Homeric period. Production on customer demand already took place; goods were imported, but mostly raw materials and on a very small scale. The liveliness of such ‘economic’ activity is compared with the modern industrial age. In relation to the latter, there is no doubt for Beloch that the economy of Attica during the classical period and before that was rather primitive. By ‘primitive’ he seems to have meant ‘simple’.

Beloch’s paper ‘Heavy Industry in Antiquity’ (1899) led Finley and others to swiftly conclude that Beloch’s position was preposterous.<sup>379</sup> Indeed the title alone casts doubt over the academic value of his works. Besides the fact that Beloch processes the historical material with great detail, here too he falls short of a complex explanation as to why production, exchange and large-scale transport of commodities were conducted by the ancients. The reader never quite finds out why the amount of free wage labour artisans

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<sup>375</sup> Beloch (1902) p. 169.

<sup>376</sup> Beloch (1902) p. 171.

<sup>377</sup> Beloch (1902) p. 176.

<sup>378</sup> Beloch (1899) p. 18.

<sup>379</sup> Schneider (1990) p. 434.

offering their services to the customer was indeed so high. On the one hand Beloch argues that 'slave labour was only lucrative for large-scale factories. Because the small artisan could hardly have had the capital to buy slaves, it is even more unlikely that he would expose himself to the risk that his only slave runs away, or dies or even is unable to work due to illness. Therefore the small artisan will always have preferred to work with free assistants'.<sup>380</sup> Due to competition, the larger factories which employ slaves are, according to Beloch, more efficient than the smaller workshops, which leads to a concentration of wealth in the hands of the large-scale factories. This is what Beloch infers, but he does not inquire into the purpose of 'economic activity' by the ancients. Bücher assumed on the contrary that the end or goal of production was primarily and dominantly for direct consumption inside the household. The two positions collide because Beloch assumes the predominant influence of 'modern economic motives' such as profit maximisation or cost minimisation and competition over certain markets for example, the amphorae market.

If for Meyer, political decision-making dominated to some considerable degree the economic life in the cities, for Beloch such an influence was of a rather minor importance.<sup>381</sup> Beloch argues that the restrictions and governmental regulations let us rather conclude the existence of a vibrant large-scale industry. The existence of large-scale textile plants and dye-work plants does, however not follow from the ethical considerations of Plato and Aristotle or the 'commercially' restrictive laws of Solon, The 'argument from silence does not hold true. Just because an influential politician does not speak about a subject matter that he morally despises, it is not to say that it exists beyond the fringes of society, to use a modern term. However, we need to stress that when reading Beloch he clearly does not assume the forms of commercial activity as they exist today. The large-scale shoe factory owned by Timachos had in total 10 to 11 workers employed.<sup>382</sup> This and many other examples highlights Beloch's weakness in finding appropriate descriptions of what must have been, even in his times, the size of the 'industrial infrastructure' of a little village like his home Nieder-Petschkendorf in north-east Prussia.

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<sup>380</sup> Beloch (1899) p. 20.

<sup>381</sup> Beloch (1899) p. 23 f.

<sup>382</sup> Beloch (1899) p. 23.

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*iv. Critique*

Beloch's position within the Bücher-Meyer Controversy cannot easily be confirmed as being strictly on Meyer's side, although it might be tempting to argue that since Beloch agreed with Meyer's criticism of Bücher's claim that the ancient economy even in the late classical period did not really develop beyond a stage of the self-sufficient *oikos*.

Regarding the rationale of those large-scale factory owners and businessmen, Beloch underlined the modern character of the ancient economy and society of the late classical period and for Rome in the first and second century AD even more strongly than Meyer did. By doing so he presupposed and universalised what may well have been the driving forces of modern capitalism as also having been the dominant rationale of the ancient Greek and Romans. This constitutes a highly problematic assumption about human nature, since it presupposes that the ancients used their rationality as a capacity in the very same way as the modern man does - at least in what Beloch would have called in 'economic' (*wirtschaftliche*) matters. However, no serious methodological and conceptual framework exists in Beloch's historiography apart from some sporadic considerations. This also comes to light in his inaugural speech at Leipzig in 1913, where he stated 'enough, more than enough about method. Let's get to the point'. Whereas Bücher and Meyer seem to be both part of more or less clearly separable, opposing traditions in their methods of interpretation of textual or archaeological sources, Beloch seems to have little need for deeper analysis and rejects the philological and materialistic traditions in the reading of history almost off-hand. Yet he uses some 'practical' aspects of both here and there without exhausting himself over philosophy and the notion of a 'historical tradition'. If the ancient philosophers are so suspicious of not disclosing the 'economic reality' or condemning what was really ongoing in the 'industrial centres', we may wonder how his statistical calculations may warrant us more certainty than the inscriptions and reports of philosophers and chronologists.

The lack of methodological clarity leads him to commit another major error, that of using a modern economic term in a quite inappropriate fashion, which put him eventually into Finley's straightjacket of being a 'modernist'.<sup>383</sup> Even if Beloch can rely on sources, which support the claim that a considerable amount of goods and materials were being

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<sup>383</sup> Finley (1980) p. 30.

transported, imported and exported, it is difficult to see that all this was primarily driven by commercial interests. The scope of trade did not seem to matter to Beloch, since he assumes that a quantitative compatibility or parallel is no doubt possible. A discussion of the degree of 'considerability' was not seriously attempted and it still should have been demonstrated by Beloch how things of different kind, such as two different cultural and historical entities, can be meaningfully compared with one another. Beloch and also Bücher are in favour of quantitative methods in economic history, but the latter at least does not subsume the peculiarity of the ancient world under the profit-driven rationale of Beloch's capitalism. If Attica did indeed have such a small trading value with the outside world compared to modern times then any quantitative comparison becomes pointless, since in such a society what Beloch and others may call 'economic' activity played only a marginal role, whereas in ours it is essential.

It is also surprising that Beloch criticised Bücher so vehemently for the use of 'case studies' into the demographic statistics of early modern Frankfurt or the tax edict by Deokletos.<sup>384</sup> Beloch himself uses this technique and is even more ready than Bücher with generalisations and 'obvious' answers, in which he applies the results of one or a few particular cases to almost any number of 'similar' cases, whereby the similarity is often made on the grounds of conjectural analysis.

However, his efforts to link social and economic history with demographic data undoubtedly constituted a noteworthy effort to break new ground and shed a critical light onto the established conservative guild of historians who almost glorified the role of the historic personality. Nevertheless, it is difficult to call this a remarkable achievement,<sup>385</sup> since the interpretation and representation of his historic sources triggered strong criticism not only by the political economist Karl Bücher, but also amongst ancient historians such as Mommsen and Münzer.<sup>386</sup> His pupil Friedrich Oertel reflects Beloch's scholarly influence in the course of his testimonial.<sup>387</sup> Beloch was probably one of the first historians who acknowledged demographic data and movements as an important indicator and module in economic history and aimed to lay down the scientific basis of such a theory. The question of how meaningful such enquiries are remains unanswered, since Beloch

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<sup>384</sup> See Bücher (1894), Bücher (1895). Cf. Beloch (1902) p. 96.

<sup>385</sup> See Brunt (1971).

<sup>386</sup> Mommsen, Th. (1908) p. 262 ff. Münzer (1927) pp. 595-599. See Seek (1897) pp. 161-176.

<sup>387</sup> Beloch (1925) p. 22.

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himself deemed this data as unreliable.<sup>388</sup>

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<sup>388</sup> Beloch influenced primarily quantitative economic history. See recently on this subject Crafts (1991) and Cohen (1992) and Duncan-Johnes (1994).

#### 4. Bücher's 'Reply' - the Nature and the Scope of Exchange in Antiquity

In the direct aftermath of the controversy Bücher was disappointed that an open exchange of arguments between him and Meyer never came about. He noted in his essay '*Zur Griechische Wirtschaftsgeschichte*' (*ZGW*) of 1901 that after Meyer had given his paper *WEa* at the German Historian Conference in 1895, an opportunity to answer Meyer's attacks was denied him.<sup>389</sup> 'Since a discussion afterwards was not endorsed, I had to resort to putting my question in private to the orator: I asked him how he [Meyer] could explain that the Romans, given the character he ascribed to their economy, never lapsed to offer their state mail services to the usage of private news agencies? He still owes me an answer to this'.<sup>390</sup>

Although it is not clear whether the *ZGW* was indeed intended to be a reply to the manifold assertions against Bücher, it has been treated as one in the later literature surrounding the issues in question. Even if the *ZGW* had no further impact on either Beloch's or Meyer's position, it will perhaps be interesting to see whether Bücher was able to answer some of the assertions, which Meyer and also Beloch raised against him.

Bücher argued that the criticism against his theory was rather selective and 'nit-picking'. His first line of defence was to emphasise that different historiographical methods can lead to very different results regarding the interpretation of the historical sources.<sup>391</sup> Unfortunately he does not pursue or elaborate upon the argument of the diversity of scientific methodologies dependent on the discipline or epistemological interest of the scientist himself. His reply to the mounting criticism of his theorem of the 'closed household economy' remains therefore confined to a further criticism of some of Beloch's and Meyer's interpretation of sources. By doing so he seems to stress far less the importance of economic modelling or any theories of 'economic stages', which he elaborated in such a detailed way in the *EdV*. Yet it was the application of just such a theory, which led him to the conclusion that the ancient economy never left the stage of the 'closed household economy'.<sup>392</sup>

<sup>389</sup> The *ZGW* was first published in 1901 and republished in extended length in Bücher *ZGW* 2<sup>nd</sup> (1922).

<sup>390</sup> *ZGW* 1<sup>st</sup> ed. (1901) p. 2 f. There is no evidence that both scholars have even been in postal contact at all.

<sup>391</sup> We suggest that Bücher aimed to silence the incorrect criticism of his stance by referring at the beginning of this work to Jacob Burckhart, whose philosophy of history influenced also Nietzsche and Meyer. *ZGW* p. 1.

<sup>392</sup> See *EdV* p. 90.

Bücher was justified in answering his harsh critics in an equally robust fashion. However, he could not avoid having to admit in the *ZGW*, by referring to the *EdV*, that although maintaining that he was right with regard to the ‘general impetus and content of his work...some arguments were not as thoroughly set out as they should have been’.<sup>393</sup> However, small errors in the philological detail, which a well-read ancient historian could have exposed fairly easily were not Bücher’s prime concern. Given the negative reaction of his opponents to Bücher’s open invitation to debate the issues regarding the controversy in the *Zeitschrift für die Gesamte Staatswissenschaft*, Bücher could only conclude that they either must have remained intentionally ignorant toward the main issues or that a shift of the debate into mere technical minutiae was on their agenda.<sup>394</sup> Whether Bücher was correct in his judgement shall be examined in Part II, when ideological divisions and methodological differences between the participants move into the centre of our attention.

Bücher’s ‘reply’ is based on three arguments, which in one form or another appeared already in the *EdV*. Firstly, Bücher points out that the ancients were different from later cultures and even from other ancient Oriental civilisations.<sup>395</sup> This is expressed in their ethical resentment to exchange in the form of *chrematisticae*. As we recall Beloch found this argument especially difficult to accept, but the latter’s counter explanation is even less convincing.

Secondly, and this is perhaps a stronger claim, Bücher seriously questioned the extent of ‘free labour’. Instead he argued that slavery constituted the highest form of development of the ‘closed household economy’<sup>396</sup> This is not meant in an ethical way of course. The cultural difference of the Greeks did not mean for Bücher exclusiveness or isolation from migration and external cultural influences. We noted that Beloch and Meyer assumed a lively migration of artisans offering their services in the urban centres and pointed out the inefficiency of maintaining slaves in small workshops.

Thirdly, Bücher excuses some of his inaccuracies and generalisations in the *EdV* on the grounds that his paper was written for a wider audience and was rushed since he had to

<sup>393</sup> Two points are worth noting: Firstly, Bücher stresses the point that his paper ‘*Die Entstehung der Volkswirtschaft*’ was written for an audience of different backgrounds. Secondly, he expressed his dissatisfaction with the paper in a letter to his colloquies and friend Alois Schulte 3/VI/1895 in Braubach (1963) p. 378 n6. Here also more about Bücher’s life and intellectual friendship with Schulte.

<sup>394</sup> It should be noted that Beloch’s (1902) publication *Zur Griechischen Wirtschaftsgeschichte* does not address or consider Bücher’s arguments in the *ZGW*. It seems that Beloch has not read or had knowledge of its publication.

<sup>395</sup> This was heavily disputed by Meyer in his *WEdA* and by his colleague Kurt Breysig (1901) vol. II p. 95.

<sup>396</sup> *ZGW* p. 2 See also *EdV* p. 23.

step in for another speaker at the German Historian Conference.<sup>397</sup> This is certainly a point many of his opponents would have forgiven him. However, it is a pity with regard to the outcome of the controversy that Bücher did not go beyond some counterattacks and a reinterpretation of selected philological sources, which aimed to underline the qualitative difference between ancient and modern economic life.

A few examples may serve us as an illustration of the merits and shortcomings of his reply. Firstly, by referring to Burckhardt's cultural historical theory about the nature of ancient political life, Bücher describes the peculiarities of the ancient economy as a 'private economy'. This means for Bücher a 'non-national economy'. Therefore he concludes we cannot apply the presuppositions of 'a theory of national economy' to antiquity. Here Bücher argues in particular against Beloch's speculations about the amount of factories and its 'free' workforce. On the contrary, Bücher pointed out that seasonal demands and personnel fluctuation constituted a kind of manufactory very different from the modern regime. Unfortunately, Bücher does not pursue the quest for a qualitative distinction between the ancient and modern economy, when it comes to the economic practices. A 'Wurst-seller', for example, was according to Bücher primarily a 'Wurst-maker' and not someone who traded the product.<sup>398</sup> Besides the fact that this is also a speculation, it is difficult to see what this point is supposed to achieve. Even nowadays, farmers and butchers sell their produce directly to the consumer. This was even more the case a hundred years ago.

Secondly, Bücher admits that import and export of commodities for daily use took place, but remained adamant that its extent was small and non-regular. In this context, Bücher voiced concern against Beloch's statistical inquiries. This is surprising since Bücher himself constructs tables and analyses numerical data in order to make what has now become primarily a quantitative argument.<sup>399</sup> However, it needs to be pointed out that those quantitative elements nevertheless constitute a smaller proportion than in Beloch's analysis. Bücher also voiced his scepticism about the universality of the statistical method in economic history, since it is difficult to determine the reliability of such sporadic data, which the ancients left us with. Throughout the discussion Bücher intended to show how unacceptable Beloch's statistical method was, since its method of evaluation is a direct descendent of the modern economy. By doing so Bücher fails to realise that his opponents

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<sup>397</sup> ZGW p. 2.

<sup>398</sup> ZGW p. 15.

could have equally resorted to the argument that different methods achieve different results and that thereby his theory of 'economic stages' is also a product of the modern science of political economy. Bücher does not regard this as endangering the correctness of his position.

The third argument raises an interesting question over the institutionalisation of trade or rather lack of institutionalisation of commerce in antiquity. Bücher points out that a modern export system or export trade would have demanded and required special attention in peace negotiations. Large-scale commercial enterprises would certainly have been discussed at political and elders' meetings, but there is no record of this. Bücher primarily questions Beloch's stance that if trade played such a significant part in the economy of classical Greece such that it can be at least quantitatively be compared with capitalism of the 18<sup>th</sup> and early 19<sup>th</sup> century, why did none of the ancient Greek city-state holders consider it as a powerful tool and recognise its positive or negative effects in lengthy discussions?<sup>400</sup>

As we have seen, Beloch tried to prove the modern export character of classical Greece with large findings of Greek amphorae in many parts of the Mediterranean world. Beloch infers the existence of large-scale factories from the signatures on the amphorae by the master. Bücher holds against this claim that 'we simply do not know whether we are dealing with an entrepreneur or a worker. And in the former case, whether we are dealing with a factory owner or a craftsman. In the latter instance, we do not know whether we are dealing with free men or slaves. If one intends to attribute industrial importance to the signatures, it is best for our understanding if we assume we are dealing with workers, who had to indicate how many vases each of them had produced since they were perhaps paid by the quantity which they have produced'.<sup>401</sup> Other possibilities are considered too, but it becomes apparent in this statement that Bücher himself can not refute Beloch's position and declares the ancient economy as 'primitive' meaning 'underdeveloped'. All he seems to say is that we simply do not know what to conclude from this. This is of course not a satisfactory result for a historian, who would admit that no one will ever quite know exactly what the nature of 'economic life' in Greece's Golden Age was really about. However difficult the process of interpretation of the historical sources might be, a historian will nevertheless provide his audience with the best possible scenario based on

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<sup>399</sup> See *ZGW* pp. 85-86.

<sup>400</sup> *ZGW* p. 29 f.

the available materials.

Bücher's reply; in the *ZGW*, constitutes a shift in his original position, which he cannot simply brand as a clarification since some premises of his argument have clearly changed. Against the rigid application of the concept of 'closed household economy', which he had earlier stated was characteristic for antiquity as a whole, he now redefined the nature of the ancient economy as a 'private economy'.<sup>402</sup> 'Private economy' is still defined by Bücher as a large household or community based economy. Bücher also answers the criticism that he was previously too generalist and superficial in the *EdV* by acknowledging the different scope of productive activity between the Athenian and the Persian household, the difference in scope and size of the local *agora* and elucidating the complex political function of money.<sup>403</sup>

Unfortunately, Bücher's 'Contribution to Greek economic history' (*ZGW*) did not result in any convergence or compromises between the participant of the debate. If at all, we can only laud Bücher's attempt to reply to his critics. His efforts to clarify and to a small degree modify his own position had the positive effect of a good critique of Beloch's arguments although the qualitative analysis is not carried through with consistency and depth.

Meyer initially complained that Bücher denied the existence of commodity exports and pressed the economy of the whole antiquity into the theoretical model of the stage of the 'closed' or 'integrated' household economy. Bücher's *ZGW* seemed to give a marginal treatment to the theoretical model of economic stages, which raises the question over Bücher's commitment to his previously vehemently defended theory. The lack of methodological reflection has the unfortunate effect that Bücher does not clearly work out the fundamental difference between capitalist forms of production and any other form of economy. That the ancient economy was not of a national or international scale is only a quantitative matter since it does not sufficiently accommodate and refute the arguments of 'commercial practices' in antiquity i.e. profit making, banking etc. The existence of customer production and production for export purpose was eventually admitted in the *ZGW* and constitutes a shift in his position, but does not resolve the debate.<sup>404</sup>

Bücher's hopes that political economists and ancient historians could collaborate to

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<sup>401</sup> *ZGW* p. 81 ff.

<sup>402</sup> *ZGW* p. 31 ff.

<sup>403</sup> *ZGW* p. 30 ff.

<sup>404</sup> *ZGW* p. 46.

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analyse all available materials and sources in order to create a discussion platform about the nature of ancient economic life were disappointed. Partially responsible was the lack of clarity on all sides and the lack of a common methodological framework, which left the most crucial question, whether the ancient economy was different in nature or only in scope or scale from the modern economy, still unresolved.

## Résumé

For Meyer, culture, history and politics are interconnected to one another. However, his parallels between antiquity and the rise of capitalism are somewhat dubious observations. It seems that Meyer sees a threat to civilisation and prosperity with the rise of modern free market capitalism. His efforts to draw similarities between the economic decline of antiquity and his concerns about the political threat to the German monarchy by the bourgeoisie and the socialist make his works in ancient economic history suspicious of being an instrument to further an ideology, a suggestion which we shall discuss in the next part.

Meyer's substantial contribution to ancient history was to constitute a previously untried attempt to grasp all aspects of the development and decline of the ancient civilisation by acknowledging cultural achievements and diversity, but also to create a lively awareness of the problems which every culture faces in political and 'economic' matters.<sup>405</sup>

The Bücher-Meyer Controversy was quickly recognised as an important battlefield for a great number of historians, economists, philosophers and sociologists, who felt obliged to participate in the debate in various ways. Already L. M. Hartmann in 1896 criticised Meyer's conclusion because the latter did not treat the ancient economy as essentially different from our modern economy.<sup>406</sup> We have seen that such a conclusion is unjustified - Johannes Hasebroek in his work, *Griechische Wirtschafts- und Gesellschaftsgeschichte*, added even more categorically that the used evidences which is supposed to support a modern interpretation of the ancient economy, cannot survive at close examination.<sup>407</sup> This is even truer when we view the debate from the contemporary knowledge about those sources. The crucial point is however not the evidence *per se*, but its understanding or interpretation.

Regarding Bücher, despite any sympathies with his original stance, one cannot and should not overlook the clear weaknesses in his approach. He was unable to prove to his audience the fundamentally different nature of the economy of classical Greece and beyond. The Roman 'economy' is not considered at all. Also, it is difficult to see how

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<sup>405</sup> See *WEdA* p. 101 n1.

<sup>406</sup> See Hartmann (1896) p.153 f and Christ (1982) p. 70 ff.

<sup>407</sup> Hasebroek (1931) p. 10.

economic history can be compressed into stages of economic development. The 'economic' life of antiquity, in fact social life in general was, and remains, too complex in order to characterise it in such a formal and, regarding the *EdV*, in an almost mechanical way. Such theories are also a product of the enlightenment and the science of political economy which emerged with modernism. Bücher fails to demonstrate that the *oikos* based economy is indeed the 'economically' dominating institution throughout ancient world and that any commercial activities are of no significance for the general character of this economy.

With the detailed elucidation of the original arguments between Bücher, Meyer and Beloch, we hope to have shown so far that the controversy involved a much richer content and depth than admitted by those contemporary authors, who are more often than not satisfied with the condensed and oversimplified versions of the debate.

Although with Meyer and Beloch we are clearly dealing with attempts to interpret the historical detail of the ancient economy with modern capitalism, such parallels are explicitly only drawn between certain periods of antiquity such as the late classical period and Rome in the late 1<sup>st</sup> century AD. A plain *modernism*, which understands the ancient social life solely in modern terms and with a modern perspective for pragmatic purposes in order to make room or propagate the modern market economy, for example, has never occurred in the works of any serious participant in the controversy. Meyer's and Beloch's exaggerations of certain periods also have to be seen in the context of their highly differentiated and complex pictures of antiquity and their enthusiasm for the historical discipline. However, apart from Meyer's methodological considerations a clear debate on method is missing in both Bücher and Beloch. Hence, the question remains as to why the controversy was so bitterly fought and failed to establish any compromise between the participants. Many arguments and the amount of polemic discussions indicate a deep ideological gulf between the subjects of political economy and ancient history. We shall explore in the next part how complex and significant the ideological and political struggle was in those subjects and beyond between the 1890s and the 1920s.

## **Part II. Method or Ideology? The Political and Philosophical Context of the Bücher-Meyer Controversy**

‘Scientific truths are not the acquisition of one human being only. They are determined through repeatable observation by different scientists and in mutual discussion. Hereunto rests the justification of the scientific critique.’

KARL LAMPRECHT

## Introduction

During the first part we have indicated that the Bücher-Meyer Controversy involved a whole range of interconnecting historical and methodological problems. We shall see whether their conflicting positions also reflect upon the political and philosophical *Weltanschauung*, and in what way such divisions dominated their methodology. It is necessary to investigate whether the apparent misunderstandings in the debate and polemic exchanges between Bücher, Meyer and Beloch bring to light some contrary standpoints over specific political and social questions of their time, and whether they stand in some connection to the different methodologies in ancient history and economic theory. In order to achieve a deeper understanding of the causes and the dissatisfying outcome of the controversy, we shall examine the intellectual context of the arguments in more detail. Coinciding methodological debates within ancient history and political economy will also be assessed in the light of the political, social and ideological climate of late 19<sup>th</sup> century Germany. More specifically, this means we shall focus on the historiographical and methodological aspects of Meyer's theory affected as it was by the diminishing, but still predominant, influence of Historicism over the human sciences ('*Geisteswissenschaften*') in Germany during the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

The results of the above discussion shall be contrasted with new methodological approaches in the new academic territories of sociology, psychology, cultural history and political economy, which started to question seriously the domination of historical studies and its methodology. The delayed, but in comparison more dramatically changing, social and economic environment in the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century shall also be examined in order to investigate whether such factors are of any significance to the polemic course of the Bücher-Meyer Controversy.

During the various aspects of the discussion in Part I, we suggested the following structure for this part. *Firstly*, we shall consider the traditional theory of historicism in order to elucidate its influence on Meyer's stance. *Secondly*, we shall shed light on the political sources and ideological goals of this approach. *Thirdly*, we shall look at the new and alternative methodological challenges put forward by Karl Lamprecht, and the famous 'debate on method' between Lamprecht and traditional historiographical scholarship. *Fourthly*, we shall discuss the neo-Kantian response to Lamprecht in its efforts to defend the established consensus over the existence of a distinctive methodology for the human

sciences compared to the methodology of the natural sciences. *Fifthly*, we shall examine the crisis in classical studies and ancient history to which Meyer responded indirectly when criticising Bücher's stance. *Finally*, we shall explain the nature of the methodological debates within political economy.

The appendix to this part attempts to introduce the original and controversial position of Robert von Pöhlmann, who attempted to combine ancient history with political economy in investigating contemporary political questions. Overall, this part attempts to establish how the unprecedentedly turbulent political, social and economic events, which were accompanied by serious ideological quarrels, profoundly affected the Bücher-Meyer Controversy and were partly responsible for the lack of a satisfying solution to the debate and its associated questions.

## 1. Ranke - The Prussian Reformation and 'State Historian'

Eduard Meyer's paper 'Economic Development of Antiquity' (*WEdA*) of 1895, argued that central issues in ancient social and economic history can only be properly understood historically if the historian accepts the predominance of the 'political' in history. By demanding this, Meyer committed himself to Niebuhr's and Ranke's historiographical approaches, which previously dominated the historical scholarship both in Prussia and later in the unified German Reich, throughout the 19th century.<sup>1</sup> The pre-eminence of this approach is represented in Meyer's emphasis on the educational and political value of ancient history with regard to the present. Meyer even goes so far to compare the educational goals of the classical period with the purpose of modern education, though without equating the ancient and the modern epoch in all political aspects.<sup>2</sup>

Meyer's, Beloch's and also Georg von Below's uncompromising criticism of Bücher's and Karl Lamprecht's 'methodological aberrations' exemplify that the established ancient and modern historians did not in the slightest accept Ranke's and Niebuhr's event and individual orientated theory of history under theoretical scrutiny.<sup>3</sup>

One of the many rejected theories was Bücher's 'theory of economic stages' (*Theorie der wirtschaftlichen Entwicklungsstufen*).<sup>4</sup> Meyer's and Beloch's brisk opposition to new methodological approaches not only has its strong roots in the theoretical paradigm of German Idealism, of which Ranke was the most influential envoy, but should also be regarded as a conservative reaction against positivism and materialism, which were deemed to pose a serious threat to the established historiographical method.

Ranke's work was highly influential indeed. In 1895 Meyer praised him as the historian 'to whom we owe everything'.<sup>5</sup> Friedrich Meinecke, who greatly contributed in making Ranke's achievements known in Germany and throughout Europe's historiographical scholarship, argued that 'world tradition', 'world momentum' and 'individual creativity' had to operate together in order to emulate the achievements of

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<sup>1</sup> Some writers argue that Ranke's and Niebuhr's dominated German historiography even as long after World War II. See Vierhaus in Faulenbach (1974) p. 32 and Berding in Wehler (1971) p. 10.

<sup>2</sup> Meyer (1918) p. 6 ff.

<sup>3</sup> On Niebuhr and Roman and 'universal' history see Christ (1983) vol. 3 pp. 1-25.

<sup>4</sup> Schumann (1974) p. 180.

<sup>5</sup> *GdA* vol. I.1 p. 185, I.2. p. 145.

Ranke. 'The 'world tradition' was that golden chain of spirits, which reaches over two thousand years from Plato and Plotin to Herder and Goethe. The world momentum was the silence before the storm...which led during a break in the fever of the revolutionary times to a re-determination and, at the same time, to a new-determination of the worthy content of the Western culture.'<sup>6</sup> Meinecke added that the 'young Ranke has already understood this momentum, which matches no comparison and with his genius for discovery has uncovered the principles of historical understanding.'<sup>7</sup>

Meinecke praised Ranke for pointing out that the successful outcome of the Franco-Prussian War of 1870-71 laid down the foundation of the 2<sup>nd</sup> German *Reichsgründung* by Bismarck under the hegemony of Prussia. After some initial doubts, this marked for Ranke an important signal for political stabilisation and guaranteed the cultural continuity of Western civilisation.<sup>8</sup>

Ranke's theories opposed the classicist ideas of German Humanism. In doing so, he rejected the idea of progress in history in any form. Instead Ranke argued that 'each epoch is directly to God, and its value does not rest upon what may result from it, but in its own existence, in its own self.'<sup>9</sup> His words were directed against those who believed in the idea of the progressive character of world history. For the neo-Humanists, such as Herder, Goethe and perhaps most prominently W. v. Humboldt this involved the incorporation of ancient values into their modern value systems.<sup>10</sup> Meinecke had already drawn attention to this in 1923: 'Ranke rejected this new reading of the ancients.'<sup>11</sup> One should rather attempt to read them in the same way the ancient historians themselves would have done. That which connected historical epoch with God and made it so peculiar and special, 'whose life showed traces of God's imprint in his will and action.'<sup>12</sup> For Ranke this was in the spirit of Luther, whose achievements found a much-celebrated revival in 1817 with the 3<sup>rd</sup> centenary of the '95 Theses of Wittenberg'. The absence of spirituality in everyday life in Ranke's day, which went hand-in-hand with his anti-Humanist criticism is perhaps a good example of a conservative and restorationist political position. However, at this point

<sup>6</sup> Meinecke (1948) p. 56.

<sup>7</sup> We should add here that Ranke accepted only reluctantly this constitutional change See Lieberschütz (1954) p. 14 f.

<sup>8</sup> See Lieberschütz (1954) p. 3.

<sup>9</sup> See Meinecke (1948) p. 100.

<sup>10</sup> The term '*Humanismus*' itself emerged only in the early years of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. It seems on the surface that this movement rejected entirely the scholastic strongly Aristotelian value system. However, it never entirely disconnected or even superseded its commitment to be worthy to be God's creatures, if they emphasised individual responsibility and freedom. See Engel (1959) pp. 23-4

<sup>11</sup> Meinecke (1948) p. 59.

<sup>12</sup> Lieberschütz (1954) p. 5.

Ranke committed a fallacy; he idealised the Lutheran piety of the early 16<sup>th</sup> century and ignored the fact that Luther's radicalism was a direct response to a Germany that was socially shattered, politically divided and religiously challenged. Hence, Ranke committed the same mistake which he had previously accused the neo-Humanists of – that of being *ahistoric* and modernistic.

His political position resisted any kind of constitutional change and he defended the pre-Revolutionary monarchies.<sup>13</sup> Ranke's deep concern about the impact of the French Revolution on Western civilisation is perhaps best exemplified by his characterisation of this event as having 'created a permanent crisis of the modern world. The idea of equality in law and political economy as the extension of the state power, undermined all previously existing forms of life, thus awakening a spirit of greed and criticism.'<sup>14</sup> It was only after the revolutionary years of 1848/49 that Ranke started to concede that there was some justification for the establishment of a constitutional monarchy.<sup>15</sup> This may signal a move away from his originally held position that the outcome of the anti-Napoleonic 'Liberation Wars' (*Freiheitskriege*) of 1812/13 constituted a clear indication of a forthcoming completion in the development of independent European nation states. However, Ranke seemed to refuse to incorporate an account of occurring changes in the socio-economic landscape of Europe in his overall position. As a professor of history from 1834, and later also as Chancellor at Prussia's finest and most modern university of the day - the 'Friedrich Wilhelms University (today Humboldt University) Berlin' - Ranke supported the idea of a united Germany under Prussia's rule with the preservation of the powers of the aristocracy as the only guarantee of Western cultural continuity. In 1841 Ranke was awarded the honour of the '*Historiograph des Preußischen Staates*' by King Friedrich Wilhelm IV, an honour which he proudly accepted. It could thus be argued that Ranke modified his later stance in order to become a theoretical mouthpiece for the 'old monarchy'.<sup>16</sup> Indeed his defence of the institutional *status quo* concurs with his main argument against the socio-psychological approach in historiography, which began to bear fruit amongst the neo-Humanists. Ranke argued that 'it cannot be the task of the historian to explain all events out of the minds of the acting persons; there has to be something else

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<sup>13</sup> His sympathy for the preservation of the Hohenzollern Monarchy and reluctance to countenance democracy can be exemplified in a letter to Wilhelm IV in 1848 recommending a guarantee against unemployment for artisans with the condition that they would have no political influence on state affairs. See Lieberschütz (1954) p. 15 n37.

<sup>14</sup> See Gilbert (1990) p. 6.

<sup>15</sup> Vierhaus (1957) p. 31.

which stands above and governs them; what ever it might be called, fate, providence, God, as well as the event which stands above them and which the acting persons do not create, but rather contribute towards its occurrence consciously or unconsciously.’<sup>17</sup> Yet Ranke rejected a mere pragmatic-psychological explanation of an event or a historical decision. Even though Alexander von Humboldt aimed to create a *Weltanschauung*, which was capable of understanding the meaning of actions and individual aspirations, this *Weltanschauung* would be geared towards a unifying end. In opposition his equally prominent brother, Wilhelm von Humboldt argued that it is ‘least world-historic, to discredit the tragedy of world history to the drama of everyday life, which attempts to rip the single event out of the general context and puts it in the place of universal fate - a petty loose stuff of mere personal desires.’<sup>18</sup> Ranke maintained contrary to this claim, that the meaning of *Weltgeschichte*, or what makes ‘world history’ universal, can only be established on the basis of a theory of ideas, which are reducible to a primary or single universal principle. ‘It comes to light that the philosopher, who starts off elsewhere, constructs history with a truth found in his own peculiar way.’<sup>19</sup> Ranke argued that truth in the humanist and the naturalist tradition is regarded as something entirely dependent on the condition whether or not the events fit into their terminology and categorical system. That is to say, they apparently rejected any notion of ‘objective truth’ outside the narrow limits of their discourse. Further, Ranke asserted that Humboldt and his followers would only look into history in order to find the ‘infinite’ or the ‘absolute’ with respect to biological development and physical motion. The historian however, ‘realises the existence of eternity in every existing entity, in every circumstance and essence, which comes from God - and that is their principle of existence [*Lebensprinzip*],’ and Ranke asked ‘how something could exist without the divine cause of existence?’<sup>20</sup> Yet Ranke did not argue against the whole tradition of enlightenment philosophy in general, nor against Hegel’s claim that absolute knowledge can be achieved by the means of a science of logic. Ranke’s assertion was rather aimed against the subjective-idealistic doctrine of Kant which, according to Ranke, presupposes that every object has its own individual past, and that this is as far as history can reach for Kant.<sup>21</sup> Since Ranke did not regard the ‘spiritual

<sup>16</sup> Vierhaus in Faulenbach (1974) p. 32. See also Ranke’s works on the History of Prussia and for a detailed bibliography on Ranke See Dickens (1980) pp. 19-20.

<sup>17</sup> Hinrichs (1954) pp. 109-110.

<sup>18</sup> Humboldt (1841) 1. p. 17.

<sup>19</sup> Ranke (1954) p. 293.

<sup>20</sup> Ranke (1954) p. 295.

<sup>21</sup> Viikari (1977) p. 28. For the philosophical influence of Hegel on Ranke see Simon (1928).

perception' as a method, he rejected the idea of the existence of one single dominant world historical idea, as Hegel did. Ranke argued instead for the existence of a finite number of dominating historical ideas operating inside and beyond a historical era. He believed that those ideas stand above the reality and the history of single entities. They characterise a historical period and influence the course of events. Those ideas are partly represented in the spirit and actions of historic personalities, of pure politicians and other outstanding historical individuals. These ideas become apparent mainly in the aspirations of agents who possess great willpower, religious purity, and who struggle for the realisation and formation of an independent nation state. The survival and success of such a state is dependent on its efficient and effective bureaucratic apparatus. Ranke is therefore not an antiquarian historian, who loved the 'old stuff' and the sources for their own sake. The investigation of historical sources forms the basis for the development of 'political history', which precedes and dominates all other aspects of human life. Ranke's concern is not the state or progress of individual fulfilment, but rather the 'individuality of the *State* as expressed in its laws and institutions.'<sup>22</sup> He stresses that 'practically the idea lives on in the true statesmen and governs their behaviour. On their thought, on their ideals depends the spiritual existence of the state'. Ranke however adds that 'the states themselves are products of a creative genius neither of single human beings nor of a single generation, nor of language, but of a whole and of many types...and since they are derived from a primary energy, they possess laws of their own kind.'<sup>23</sup> This emphasis is picked out by Lieberschütz: 'for Ranke the historian has to work in an atmosphere of sympathy with the powerful rulers and the great statesmen; without this sympathy his reconstruction of the past would be merely that of a moralist or bystander.'<sup>24</sup>

Ranke also clearly acknowledged that history is not always governed solely by the ideas of leading personalities and admits that material forces and 'social' circumstances also play their part in the historical decision-making process of the statesmen. However, unlike the historical materialistic approach of the mid-late 19<sup>th</sup> century, a concept of the 'masses' and a notion of 'class-struggle' are not created and considered in order to analyse social and economic relationships between groups of individuals and the state, but only as far they are a factor in the historical decision-making process. This idea should not be misunderstood as resembling Hegel's historical dialectic between individual and *Geist*,

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<sup>22</sup> Lieberschütz (1954) p. 12.

<sup>23</sup> Ranke *Vom Einflusse der Theorie* p. 244-246 in *Sämtliche Werke* IL-I quoted in Viikari (1977) p. 28.

<sup>24</sup> See Lieberschütz (1954) p. 11 n22.

which Ranke rejected. Ranke's *Universalgeschichte*, as opposed to Hegel's, views culture in the widest sense as 'alongside the two giants, Church and State, as a third and independent force of human affairs.'<sup>25</sup> How these factors interact, and how predominant the Lutheran 'giant' for the German nation was, is demonstrated in great length in Ranke's voluminous work '*Geschichte der Reformation in Deutschland*', which appeared in six volumes between 1839-1847.<sup>26</sup> It is however indisputable that for Ranke 'proper' historical understanding is only conditional on a certain piety or as Ranke put it: 'in all history resides, liveth and is God to see. Every action is testimony of him, every moment preaches his name, but most of all...the coherence of the great history, which stands there like a holy hieroglyph.'<sup>27</sup>

Despite some scope for varying interpretations of this famous statement, we are able to see that Meyer's, and to a lesser degree Beloch's, notion of the 'important' and the 'grandiose' in history is clearly influenced by Ranke's quest for the most 'outstanding' or the 'glorious' in history. Hinrichs pointed out that 'both historians, Ranke and Meyer, believe in the divine idea, which, if all-powerful everywhere and every time, governs human beings, in an obvious way.'<sup>28</sup> Despite the acknowledgement of the impact of the masses on history, which Meyer also accepted, there should be no doubt about Ranke's emphasis on the dominant role and importance of the decision making of the *politicos*. This raises certainly the sort of questions which Meyer faced later. After compiling and archiving the historical sources carefully and eagerly, the historian has to make a decision as to what is, according to his judgement, the truly historically important event or idea. Even if this idea or standard shines down most brightly from the inspiration of Luther, Ranke has to analyse critically his own moral and political values.

As one may perhaps suspect, in respect of the perfect or proper form of the state, Ranke does not regard every constitution as of equal historical/political worth. Like Plato, Ranke searched for an ideal form of state and as we have emphasised above, this ideal seems to be best represented in the 'old monarchies' of the pre-revolution period, which Ranke refers to as 'holy' to him.<sup>29</sup> Ranke regarded states as acting 'individualities' (realisations of 'God's will'), with different requirements in terms of their organisational structure and their place in Western history. Therefore, there might be a certain general

<sup>25</sup> Dickens (1980) p. 6.

<sup>26</sup> See Dickens (1980) p. 6.

<sup>27</sup> *Kirchenlexikon* (1994) VII pp. 1324 f.

<sup>28</sup> Hinrichs (1954) p. 111 f.

form of those states, which would allow each particular nation to prosper politically and morally and to acquire its 'natural position' in the European political order.

With regard to Germany this form would ideally be a non-parliamentary monarchy, which was reformed into a parliamentary monarchy after Bismarck's constitutional reform in 1871. By idealising the latter system, Ranke clearly opposed the liberal tendencies of the years of transition between the spirit of the German reformation, which dominated the German enlightenment, and the spirit of modernity which enforced the idea of religious and moral purity, economic progress and political imperialism. The latter aspect is derived from a kind of innate sense for the historically important moment. Prussia's Germany deserved in his view to become a 'super power'. This highlights Ranke's general scepticism and his complete rejection of the rising spirit of capitalism and value pluralism - a view almost identical with that held by (the later) Meyer. Democratic participation of individuals, and 'universal' civil liberties, were for Ranke neither universally applicable nor did they hold any kind of objective moral truth. This is not to say that Ranke entirely ignored the social and economic component and the often-desperate living conditions of the working class in the Germany of his times, as Viikari has suggested.<sup>30</sup> We see rather that Ranke as well as Meyer rejected the increasingly widespread emphasis on social and material forces as being dominant for the historical analysis.<sup>31</sup> Society, for Ranke, is an inseparable part of the state. It has to be guided but also morally enriched by the state. As for Plato, a just society is possible only through a just state, which ought to be governed by a wise, and in Ranke's case, Lutheran authority.<sup>32</sup> This is not to say that Ranke and Meyer ever argued that the state should be blind, brutal and ignorant towards the social needs of its citizens. However, the state should always be in full control of its affairs and offices; that is to govern the citizens, guard its power institutions and to advise everyone about their obligations towards the authority. For Ranke, and for Meyer too, free market capitalism and communism both represented the danger of incorporating or utilising the state for petty moneymaking or for plebeian purposes. Giving way to such forces would reduce and undermine any powerful constitution until nothing but a laughable 'toy-soldier' is left, which could be forced to realise certain short-term interests of the greedy bourgeoisie or the never-fed mob. That

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<sup>29</sup> Ranke tries to accomplish his quest for the 'best' state in his work *Politisches Gespräch* (1835) See Viikari (1977) p. 31.

<sup>30</sup> Viikari (1977) p. 32.

<sup>31</sup> Vierhaus (1957) p. 34.

<sup>32</sup> Extensively on this topic see Dickens (1980).

Bismarck's politics in 2<sup>nd</sup> 'German Reich' effectively encouraged capitalist competition and consistently made political concessions to its entrepreneurs who allied themselves with parts of the aristocracy were regarded as not worth considering for Ranke and the early Meyer. Perhaps Bismarck's imperialistic ambitions to make Germany the centre of Europe might have prevented their realising that the Bismarck regime fostered at least indirectly the values they both opposed. This suggests that Ranke's idealism and historiographical methodology was not of a superior standing, but just part of a different worldview.

Ranke's paradigm of the superiority of the political therefore led Meyer to hold that social and economic history have their justification only as subordinate parts of the 'state science' (*Staatswissenschaften*), which included jurisprudence (*Rechtswissenschaft*) and, from the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, also *Nationalökonomie*. These disciplines are therefore positive sciences, which are intellectual tools in the hands of the Chancellor, but do not and should not dictate any politics.<sup>33</sup> Ranke's emphasis on the state and its institutions as the historically important factors determining the character of a historic era. This also becomes clear in the following quote: he states that 'the character of a nation depends on how it treats its soldiers after they have lost a war.'<sup>34</sup> This political statement is of course not an attempt to reduce the character of a nation to a single factor, but what it certainly expresses is the importance of military strength and discipline and the proper respect due to it by the state and its citizens.

From this we are inclined to conclude that Meyer's political position marks a continuation of Ranke's views, and is therefore politically deeply rooted in the tradition of Prussian nationalism. Secondly, it is theoretically tied up with the philosophy of history of Ranke. We already highlighted that Meyer shared Ranke's illusion to be able to develop a methodology to aim to discover 'how it really was', which opened the gate for him to utilise history for 'legitimate' political purposes. That Ranke's attempt to write history with objectivity has been commonly criticised by many modern authors is not relevant to our discussion. However, not long ago Moses Finley pointed out in one of his last and most profound publications on the historiography of ancient history: 'I don't want to shatter this faith, but I have to point out that precision and truth are simply not the same', or as Acton: "no historian has uttered fewer non-truths, fewer have made fewer errors. All

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<sup>33</sup> To a degree, Ranke acknowledges certain limits and restrains in the economy, in terms of peculiarities in natural resources and the landscape, but this thought never led to any rethinking of economic aims other than to serve the state and by doing so serving society.

<sup>34</sup> Meinecke (1948) p. 9.

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that he says is often true and yet the whole is not true, only the element of non-truth is difficult to discover...Ranke does not trick us by adding, but through his selection".<sup>35</sup>

Further, even the Greek Atomists did not question the political nature of the unchanging human rationality. The latter point seems especially to have been a long lasting presupposition in philosophical thought, which regards human rationality as a non-historical capacity. If human rationality remains unchanged then Ranke's conclusion that ancient historians like Thucidides followed roughly the same historic methodology as he has done becomes clearer, but is nevertheless based on a fallacy.

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<sup>35</sup> Finley (1984) p. 270 f. n16.

## 2. German Idealism and the 'German Spirit' - the 'Revolution from 'Top to Bottom'

### *i. Political Event History and Bismarck's Grand German Vision*

The second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century marks a peculiar period for Western intellectual history in general and for Germany's history in particular. The influence of German Idealism in philosophy seemed to have declined after Hegel's death in 1831. It was not until the late 19<sup>th</sup> century when, with the neo-Kantians, Heinrich Rickert and Wilhelm Windelband, philosophy as an academic discipline celebrated a revival as a dominating force in Germany's academic world. After Hegel's death the earlier popularity of this discipline was in decline and was gradually crowded-out by the historical studies. It were no longer philosophers, but scholars in classical studies (*Altertumswissenschaft*), political economy (*Nationalökonomie*) and most notably history (*Geschichtswissenschaft*) who were at the centre of this significant transformation in European intellectual history. More plainly, the paradigms of idealism, which had dominated the above disciplines for a good century or more were slowly but steadily undermined by the psychoanalytical and sociological methodologies, which gained hold in these subjects from the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. During this by no means smooth transformation in academia it was mainly historians and political economists, and not philosophers, that discussed the major political and social questions in Germany at that time.<sup>36</sup>

Politically, the revolution of 1848/49 (if it can be regarded as one) did not lead to the much-desired significantly increased influence of the bourgeoisie on the distribution of political power in Germany. Although the emerging and fast-growing working class was considered by Germany's nascent bourgeoisie as a highly important 'partner' in their bid to gain economic liberties, which other entrepreneurs in Britain and France had already enjoyed for decades, they also needed the co-operation of the aristocracy in order to gain a stake in the distribution of legislative political power to secure their interests. This became particularly apparent after Germany's 'young' bourgeois classes failed miserably in their attempt to overthrow the Hohenzollern monarchy in 1848/49. However, in order to

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<sup>36</sup> See Schleier (1965) p. 16.

achieve at least some political solidity and credibility, the bourgeoisie liased actively and openly with the aristocracy, who could no longer afford to ignore them as a political force. In the aftermath of this failed endeavour of 48/49, working class leaders accused the bourgeoisie of turning, almost oblivious of its revolutionary past and irrespectively of the poverty of the masses, against its former ally. The aristocrats, on the other hand, had to consider the increasingly economic strength of bourgeoisie in order to continue to stay in power, or to maintain at least some kind of political status quo. The political 'tête-à-tête' which took place during the 1850s between both classes resulted, though much to the disappointment of the early socialist movement, in a strong though hard fought-out alliance between the landed aristocracy and the urban bourgeoisie.

This rather unusual relationship was strengthened by the newly acquired wealth and the insatiable desire for status symbols of the upper bourgeoisie, which began increasingly to penetrate the ranks of the aristocracy by buying estates previously owned by the landed aristocracy. On the other hand, technological and scientific progress brought about a dramatically progressing level of modernisation and mechanisation of the primary i.e. agricultural sector of the German economy. The productivity increases and unrestrained exploitation of 'free land workers' saw profits soar and starvation decline. Even the poorest Prussian regions in north and east flourished relatively well.<sup>37</sup> Also, the once poor and underdeveloped large scale aristocratic estates turned to commerce and benefited significantly from the agricultural revolution, which fostered the interest of the upper class in seeing entrepreneurship succeed.

With both the best farming land and industrial areas in her hands, Prussia was able to amend and fortify her position amongst the other small German states and profited from their permanent quarrels and disunity. In 1856 Germany was still a disunited grouping of 365 small states and counties.<sup>38</sup> Prussia may have saved the German nations from Napoleon in 1813, but its occupation of the Rhineland and elsewhere made it an increasingly unpopular power. In some ways the revolution of 1848/49 was a result of this cultural and religious occupation, which was also called *Kulturkrieg*. Eventually, and many decades behind England and France, the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century saw a phenomenal growth in German industry and degree of urbanisation, which put Prussia's institutes of higher education on the forefront of the modernisation and continuous innovation. The renowned quality of the 'Humboldtian' universities in Berlin, and its

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<sup>37</sup> See Rosenberg ((969)

<sup>38</sup> See Böhme (1972).

'outposts' in Breslau and Bonn in subjects areas including engineering, military science, law and history during this period could easily match with the elite, but much smaller and more traditional universities in Germany's Southwest (Tübingen, Freiburg and Heidelberg). The progression of the 'Humboldtian' universities and their ethos did not only bear fruit in terms of technological and scientific excellence, but also satisfied Prussia's enormous demands for well educated and politically devoted civil servants. The long term political end for Prussia was the unification of Germany's small states in order to put a forceful end to the petty parochial politics '*Kleinstaaterei*', which clearly stood in the way of Germany's industrialisation and Prussia's imperial ambitions.<sup>39</sup> Rapid political changes and a 'boom and bust' economy opened the way for better organised pressure by the working class on the monarchies and the entrepreneurs.

In 1871 it seemed that the grand and central idea of the German enlightenment had become reality at last - a strong unified nation, for which Ranke, and many other thinkers before him, had been desperately waiting for. It was achieved under this peculiar alliance of bourgeoisie and aristocracy. What Britain and France had managed to create with a '*federstrich*' (feather sweep) more than two hundred years before, was accomplished by Bismarck in 1871 - the *Reichsgründung* was a direct result of this 'blood brotherhood' between Germany's fading aristocracy and the rising capitalist entrepreneurship, rather than due to the pressure of the revolting masses.

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<sup>39</sup> See for example Droysen (1886) for an ideological defence of Bismarck's plans

## ii. *The 'Prussian School' and German Nationalism*

The *Reichsgründung* in particular promoted political history as an academic discipline as it now had to fulfil a crucial task in that it was an essential vehicle for educating Prussia's elite of military personnel, civil servants and chartered accountants, and thus formed the propagandistic mouthpiece for Prussian-German nationalism. It is therefore not surprising that the main academic support for Germany's nationalistic and later imperialistic project came from an elite group of Prussian historians. Most famously, Heinrich von Treitsche (1834-1896), Heinrich von Sybel (1817-1895) and Johann Gustav Droysen (1808-1884)<sup>40</sup> were committed and outspoken supporters of a unified Germany under Prussian leadership.

These scholars formed the core of the 'Prussian Historical School'. Central to their concern was the idea of a powerful nation state with persistent economic progress. In respect of the redistribution of wealth, and in particular political power, the state should not have to make too many significant concessions to the bourgeoisie and the working classes. All three scholars were fervent supporters of the Hohenzollern monarchy and later of Bismarck, Germany's 'Iron Chancellor', who had little interest in constitutional change in Prussia, preferring to maintain the *status quo* and its position as the unifying super power amongst the German states.<sup>41</sup> Many of their historical works were therefore also intended to be political writings.

The founders of the 'Prussian Historical School' (in short 'Prussian School') addressed explicitly modern questions when dealing with historic materials. This expressed itself in countless patriotic statements of the political importance of historical studies and comparisons not only, in Droysen's case, between antiquity and modernity, but also between the mediaeval and the early modern epochs of Western and Germanic civilisation (Treitschke and Sybel). The members of the Prussian School stood firmly in Ranke's footsteps and had an enormous impact on a whole new generation of ancient and modern historians, political economists and philosophers, primarily due to its excellent historical workmanship and nationalist dedication.<sup>42</sup> This applies particularly to Meyer and Georg von Below, but also to Meinecke, Rickert, Windelband and Beloch. The influence of the

<sup>40</sup> See Droysen (1886).

<sup>41</sup> For a critical discussion of Sybel and Treitschke and the political function of the *HZ* see Schleier (1965). The study is however published by an East German scholar and does here and there exaggerate the reactionary character facade of the above Prussian State historiographers. Also Heuss (1957) pp. 359-363.

Prussian School extends even over the works of Weber, Laum and Rostovtzeff, whose contributions we shall also discuss during later chapters.

Even if emphatic nationalism may have blurred Treitschke's and Sybel's ability to grasp the difference between the objectives of politics and historical studies and respectively, between state and society, their patriotism and anti-Semitism, were for Treitschke and his collaborators never intended to become substitutes for historiographical accuracy in dealing with sources and documents.<sup>43</sup> This should, however, not divert us from the fact that, for the members of the Prussian School, history became a vehicle of their political ambitions - goals that were enthusiastically shared by many intellectuals and by the educated public at that time. This created a kind of utilisation or 'employment' of historical studies and its subjects of investigation, which Finley in turn called 'abuse' of history. Ranke warned vehemently against such misuses.<sup>44</sup> One may intend to be as accurate in the translation of inscriptions and documents as one possibly can, but the selection of which sources are historically relevant and in what way one may interpret them, is still dependent on the value judgements of the historian, who never can be entirely objective towards his method and the historical event. It is therefore appropriate to ask to what extent Ranke and the spirit of German Idealism has methodologically influenced the Prussian School?

Common to Ranke and the Prussian School was a firm belief in the ethical responsibility of the state, which develops and changes according to its own laws. Those laws, in return, effectively govern the interests of individuals and political groups. Secondly, by comprehending these laws which govern the state, it is possible to find an 'objective' stance with regard to which principles and political freedoms should exist in that state and which should be disregarded. However, this selection process can clearly not take place on the grounds of norms set arbitrarily by some established political party or splinter group (the subjective and relativistic implications for any historical evaluation were inevitable and surely too obvious to ignore). These norms should rather be in accordance with general historic laws, and therefore would not require further justification.

Ranke's and the Prussian School's shared concern was not to investigate and apply historical laws to phenomena in order to 'understand them scientifically'.<sup>45</sup> Those values,

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<sup>42</sup> Most recently on this topic Southard (1995), which was unfortunately not obtainable for this study.

<sup>43</sup> Schleier blames the lack of familiarity with the philosophy of Schelling, Hegel and Ranke for due to the ignorance and arrogance against philosophy. Schleier (1965) p. 112.

<sup>44</sup> See Finley (1984) p. 268.

<sup>45</sup> Demandt (1998) p. 82.

however, which were more 'real' (*wirklich*) than others, in particular the romanticised nationalism, differed considerably from Ranke's conservatism.

The domination of the Prussian School in historical studies, especially in the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, was however not only due to Prussia's and Germany's political situation. The enormous increase in scientific knowledge and the industrial revolution, together with the epistemologically optimistic spirit of the enlightenment, fostered academic specialisation and the emergence of new research fields, which in turn benefited historical studies and enabled it, within the space of a few decades, to deliver both a holistic and highly specialised view of world history.<sup>46</sup> The delimitation of history was however not merely a direct effect of the progress in the natural sciences, but mainly due to the recent discoveries and specialisation in fine art, architecture, philology, philosophy, jurisprudence and political economy.<sup>47</sup> The systematic historical approach to these subjects in the 19<sup>th</sup> century gained political history an all-dominating position, which led to a stark methodological and political separation between *Historie* and *Naturwissenschaft*.

However, the later 'Cinderella' treatment of historical studies by the natural sciences towards the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, which had its roots in France and England, resulted eventually in a systematic and outspoken arrogance and fierce opposition against positivism and materialism. In particular, its intrusion into the pre-eminence of historical studies and its neighbouring disciplines was seen not just as a methodological interference, but also as a direct political threat.

Another reason as to why the Prussian School gained such eminence was perhaps the Humboldtian concept of higher education, which modernised and later dominated the *Gymnasien* (secondary schools) and the Prussian universities. An additionally contributing factor might have also been the frequently voiced scepticism of many historians against the advances of modern technology.<sup>48</sup>

However, one would be mistaken to assume that we are dealing with a homogenous doctrine of thought. Politically, the Prussian School positioned and presented itself during the eventful times after the *Reichsgründung* often quite independently from political trends, and its members did argue with one another as they would with their

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<sup>46</sup> We only need to look at the sheer amount of literature on the subject of world history and the history of antiquity. See for example *Paulys Real-Encyclopädie der Classischen Altertumswissenschaft*, which collects all references in ancient history since 1893.

<sup>47</sup> See, for example, Mitscherlich 'Economic Progress, its Course and Nature' (1910)

<sup>48</sup> Demandt (1998) p. 83 f. n12 for Jacob Burckhardt's critical remarks against the railway.

opponents. It was only towards the 1870s that it seemed that the 'School' had turned into a truly conservative force with its unshakeable support for Bismarck's plans of a unified German *Reich*. The programmatic rejection of a materialistic and natural scientific reorientation of the curricula of the *Gymnasien* by the philologists went hand in hand with a stiff and continuous political opposition against socialism and the Anglo-American utilitarian ethos by the Prussian School. However, one would be mistaken in assuming a completely unified hostility against such modernist tendencies. Even amongst the members of the Prussian School who supported explicitly the course of Bismarck's government after 1871 and during the years of the 'anti-socialist laws' (*Sozialistengesetze*) of 1878-1890, the level of aversion against technological advances and the results of the natural sciences differed considerably.<sup>49</sup> With regard to politics and ideology, we should also not simply associate the Prussian School with the 'far right'. In particular Heinrich von Sybel and his colleague Ludwig Häuser obviously opposed '*Großdeutsche*' tendencies in politics and history, whose supporters aimed for a German-Austrian centralised state. The supporters of this non-federal system of government are also referred to in the literature as 'ultra-reactionary' and 'ultra-nationalistic' circles.<sup>50</sup>

The fine but important differences amongst the nationalist historians and their colleagues in the neighbouring academic subjects becomes perhaps more apparent when we consider the concept and role of the state for Ranke and the Prussian School, which is, to a considerable degree, a reflection of the Prussian-German Protestant spirit that was ingrained in their culture and ethos. According to this spirit, the state is innately concerned with unifying the power, law, the military, the economy, education and most importantly religion and morality in its hands.<sup>51</sup> Worth noting in this context is that for most members of the Prussian School, society and state are two entirely separate entities. According to Treitschke, the former has the natural tendency towards discord, diversity and disintegration; in short, a tendency towards chaos and injustice. However, the latter has the innate potential to form the institutions capable of and designed to create national prosperity, and to unite conflicting interests; in short, to provide order and justice. To speak with Treitschke's words: 'the relations amongst the social groups towards each other cannot be ordered by society itself. Such an order is inconceivable; there cannot be justice

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<sup>49</sup> See Demandt (1998) p. 84 n15, p. 85 n18, n19.

<sup>50</sup> Sybel's *Historische Zeitschrift* was aimed against these tendencies and was debated in the 'Sybel-Ficker Streit' which influenced even the historiography in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. See Schieder (1959) pp. On the debate of nation state vs. universal state see Schneider (1941) and Schleier (1965) p. 99 n10.

<sup>51</sup> Fischer (1966) p. 60 f.

stemming from different and opposing interests.’<sup>52</sup> This antidemocratic attitude which clearly emphasised the superiority of the state over society led rather unsurprisingly to ignorance of and aversion to social movements and of the economic conditions of ordinary people. As Viikari has pointed out, the concern for social and economic circumstances amongst Treitschke and Sybel seemed to have been very small indeed.<sup>53</sup> Any approach, which did not begin with the state as its first premise, was almost naturally rejected. Any venture into economic history they made took place only in the context of state administered policies. This however is not to say that economic changes were all together disregarded. For example, Treitschke and Sybel acknowledged the positive influence of the emerging railway system, as having a very significant effect on the process of the German unification.<sup>54</sup> However, they concentrated on non-economic factors. In their understanding, being a ‘state historian’ did not presuppose utter ignorance of social changes and potentially dangerous revolutionary movements. Sybel, for example, acknowledged explicitly that the French revolution was ‘a first rendition of the contradiction, which will play an important role in our time.’<sup>55</sup>

Treitschke’s and Sybel’s analyses of the revolutionary forces contained many unjustifiable and ill founded attacks against the early communist movement, which one might call propaganda or scare-mongering. This was already apparent in the context of their treatment of the 1848/49 revolution. For instance, in a chapter on Babeuf in his ‘*Revolutionzeit*’, Sybel characterised communism as the system where the state disposes arbitrarily over the property of its citizen, and without respecting any individual rights whatsoever.<sup>56</sup> For example, they rejected the distribution of patches of land, free meals for the poorest etc - at the end even La Fayette was branded a foot soldier of communism.<sup>57</sup> In a sense the noisy and continuous rejection of materialism and Anglo-American utilitarianism can be regarded as an indirect acknowledgement of the rival existence of such worldviews. In holding an almost apodictic belief that the only objective of befitting *history* is the study and emphasis of the ‘great men’, wars, architects, philosophers and artists. Such a view leads one almost instinctively to the suspicion that the working class and the bourgeoisie with their daily worries and political ambitions were not rated highly

<sup>52</sup> Fischer (1966) p. 31.

<sup>53</sup> Viikari (1977) p. 46.

<sup>54</sup> Treitschke (1889) vol. IV p. 581.

<sup>55</sup> Cit. by Schleier (1965) p. 59. See Sybel (1853) vol I p. 91. See also Fueter (1911) and Below (1916) part I.

<sup>56</sup> See Sybel (1853).

<sup>57</sup> Quoted from Schleier (1965) p. 60 f. See Sybel.(1853) especially the introduction to vol. 4

enough to form a proper object for historical inquiry. The continuously glorifying remarks about Bismarck and the Hohenzollern monarchy illustrate very vividly the political dedication of the Prussian School and foremost admiration for the Prussian State and Bismarck's goal to unify Germany under Prussia's rule.<sup>58</sup> It may therefore not come as a surprise to us that this eminent elite of historians and those following in their academic tradition, argued heavily against almost every alternative political view, which reflected a deeply rooted condemnation of almost the entire alternative political and religious spectrum, from socialism and liberalism to Catholicism and Semitism.<sup>59</sup>

Political or traditional history had, as we saw, previously been in a dominant position in German academic thought, which originated largely from the unsolved question of national identity. The unsolved national questions, the late industrialisation, the small-minded mentality fostered in the small states and Prussia's imperialistic ambitions provide valid reasons to explain this superiority of political history over other *Geisteswissenschaften*. The Prussian School, in particular in the years of the struggle for Germany's national unity, acted as a mouthpiece using history to further their political ends. The pursuit of political historiography was viewed as part of political activity.<sup>60</sup>

For the Prussian School the *Geist* of one nation is not simply commensurable with the spirit of another one. Certain nations and their bureaucratic organisations were viewed as being more advanced than others, not primarily economically, but ethically and foremost culturally. This belief is based on the historicist method of 'understanding' ('*Verstehen*'), which aims to grasp the unity of the human spirit and was first properly introduced by Gustav Droysen as a distinct methodology in the scientific fight against the influence of empiricism and materialism in history studies in particular and in the '*Geisteswissenschaften*' in general.

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<sup>58</sup> See Wehler (1972) and Rosenberg (1967).

<sup>59</sup> On academic and public discrimination and distortion of Catholicism and Semitism see Blaschke (1997).

<sup>60</sup> The amounts of monographs exemplify impressively the political fame of Sybel and Treitschke. Their political involvement is also transparent in the amount of essays and articles published by them. All the relevant works of that time have been carefully listed and considered by Schleier (1966).

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### iii. *Buckle's Positivism vs. Droysen's Method of 'Verstehen'*

Even if the position of the Prussian School and their methodological reliance on the achievements of Ranke began to come under challenge by new psychological and materialistic worldview from sources outside academia, the consensus in political history guaranteed the predominance of the Rankean concept of historiography within the university and gymnasium curricula for the time being.<sup>61</sup> Whilst reaching its intellectual zenith during the 1870s and 80s, the entanglement of Rankean historiography with the Prussian School eventually came under methodological scrutiny and ideological critique during the 1890s, when the School was no longer in a position to ignore its opponents.<sup>62</sup>

The reasons for this attack on this tradition are again manifold and complex. One perhaps was the high degree of specialisation and the philological method of source analysis, which created a culture of outstanding linguists and editors within ancient and modern history itself. Despite all the industriousness, editorial skilfulness and great factual detail, this primarily philological method in historiography created very little relevant to the burning historical questions of the time. However, the majority of German historians were adamant that they had not lost sight of the modern challenges which their German fatherland had to embrace. Determined to defy their critics, the members of the Prussian School in particular were openly politically biased towards the theoretical and institutional challenge posed by empiricism and positivism.<sup>63</sup> This created at first on their part a culture of dismissal and mockery for non-conforming methods and trends in the theory of history. This ongoing dispute culminated in the *Lamprechtstreit*, which influenced the course and the context of the Bücher-Meyer Controversy.

The precedence of the Prussian School is highly important here, since one its most prominent members, Gustav Droysen (1808-1884), influenced Eduard Meyer's philosophy of history in a significant manner. Droysen was the one of the few ancient historians besides Meyer and earlier Niebuhr 'who discussed fundamental questions on historical methodology systematically and extensively.'<sup>64</sup> Therefore, having looked at Ranke's loose theory of history and the tradition of the Prussian School in general, it is perhaps useful to

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<sup>61</sup> The achieved consensus is exemplified with the result of the 'Sybel-Ficker Streit' on German medieval history. For a good discussion on this debate see Schieder (1959) p. 37 ff.

<sup>62</sup> See Oestreich (1969) p. 322.

<sup>63</sup> Schumann (1974) p. 180.

look at Droysen's theory in particular in order to point to a the third source for Meyer's position.

Common to Droysen and to Meyer was that both argued vehemently against the claim that the history of human civilisation as a whole lies at the heart of historic explanation. Even more important was a shared wholehearted rejection of any claims that history follows certain material laws or principles, which provide us with devices to predict the occurrence of events.<sup>65</sup> This was exactly the challenge which empiricism and positivism in the natural sciences posed to political history. The increasing influence of this movement was reflected in attempts to write history in terms of social events, economic crises and cultural attributes. According to Droysen, such techniques have no right to be regarded as serious historical methods since they assume a historic 'coming into being' of events driven by social, material and natural forces and causes. Such an account stands against the concept of the 'dominating ideas', the 'decisive moments' and the omnipotence of the 'state' as a naturally dominating entity.<sup>66</sup>

Droysen's criticism is directed against three different approaches which provide a naturalistic understanding and categorisation of human history. 'Positivism', 'Economism' and 'Biologism'.<sup>67</sup> The first term was coined during the French enlightenment. In 1814, Laplace published an essay, which used the 'probability calculus' from mathematics applied to physics, and which maintained that over the length of time the regular forces or distributions are those that succeed and are therefore most worthy of studying.<sup>68</sup> This paper '*Essai philosophiquesur les probabilities*' explained the regular course of human history on the basis of population statistics, which supplied him with confidence in the likely victory of justice, reason and humanity over the erratic evil and irregular forces in history.<sup>69</sup> We mention this work because of its significant influence on later studies by August Comte (1798-1857), the great-grandfather of sociology, and Adolphe Quételet (1796-1874). Both thinkers applied mathematical and physical methods to explain moral and social phenomena. Quételet's essay on the 'social physics', for example, used curves,

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<sup>64</sup> Finley (1984) p. 271.

<sup>65</sup> Schneider in Clader III (1990) p. 423, n32 and the appendix to Buckle (1861).

<sup>66</sup> Schneider (1990) p. 429.

<sup>67</sup> See Demandt (1998) pp. 86-87. Most of the details in this paragraph stem from this source.

<sup>68</sup> See Demandt (1998) pp. 87 f.

<sup>69</sup> Laplace (1995). Beloch does not mention him as one of his influences. It is doubtful anyway that Beloch would have jumped on the positivistic bandwagon.

formulas and tables in order to calculate the 'average man' in history using statistics in order 'to prove the infinite perfectibility of mankind'.<sup>70</sup>

When Buckle in 1857 advocated these primarily quantitative methods in his *History of Civilisation of England*, he in the same breath remonstrated that historical studies are holding back human progress when compared to the natural sciences. The only way forward, according to his understanding was an uncompromising application of the methods of the natural sciences and statistics in history. Even if this may all have culminated in a vogue of enthusiasm for the physical sciences during the Victorian period, which made it difficult for classical economics to resist the fashionable movement of positivist philosophy, the German historical scholarship certainly did not open their arms for Buckle and his companions.<sup>71</sup> 'Ranke's and Niebuhr's achievements are backwards and outdated' - remarks of that nature infuriated the Prussian School, but even liberal historians such as Wilamowitz-Möllendorf voiced his criticism against Buckle. They all felt somehow bypassed by the claims to universality and the euphoria for the empirical method, based on its scientific achievements in the natural sciences. According to the Prussian School, this pseudo-historical method not only started to spread over Western Europe but also it attempted to intrude into German historical scholarship.

The plainest rejection of such intrusiveness came from Droysen, Sybel, Treitschke and Dahlmann, who saw in addition to the methodological infiltration an anti-German and liberalist plot between the lines of the universalising claims. Already by 1761, Edward Gibbon, one of the most influential ancient Roman historians, had complained that lately natural philosophers and mathematicians sit on the throne of wisdom.<sup>72</sup> Droysen complained almost a hundred years later in 1857 that *Historie* (Droysen's term for proper historical studies) seem to have been degraded to the Cinderella amongst the sciences (*Wissenschaften*).<sup>73</sup> What is interesting about this, is how the perception of the universality of the natural sciences by great historians has continued from the enlightenment into modernity.

Droysen, whose method is associated with the term historicism, argued against positivism that universally accepting the method of the natural sciences negated the hermeneutic basis of historicism and aimed to subsume the uniqueness and historical individuality of the world of human affairs. Droysen argued that not only would

<sup>70</sup> Demandt (1998) p. 87. See Quételet (1835), (1849) and on Comte's *Science as a Religion* (1909).

<sup>71</sup> Meikle in Steger (1999) p. 85.

<sup>72</sup> See Demandt (1998) p. 84, n13.

empiricism or positivism be incapable of revealing the 'spiritual' character of the world of human affairs, but its materialistic naturalistic worldview aimed to belittle human history to a subdiscipline of the natural sciences.<sup>74</sup>

Buckle's *History* aimed to show that as it is in the world of nature, so it is in the world of human affairs and that history is a system, which can be universally and consistently explained with universal concepts and in terms of the operation of natural laws. Thus he claimed that mental, physical and social laws could be subsumed under a system of general cosmic laws, and maintained that the most fundamental universal principle amongst all of them is progress, which because of Buckle's monistic worldview, could be applied without great difficulty to human history. Armed with Darwin's evolutionary theory and a vague and often mechanical notion of social 'progress', the natural philosophers of the French and English enlightenment identified and idealised scientific progress as being capable of uncovering the laws of evolution in nature, which are supposedly the key elements for furthering social, economic and therefore moral progress. In order to achieve this reorientation of historiographical methodology, Buckle argued programmatically that one might have to create an atmosphere of scepticism, which first creates a self-supportive method of scientific enquiry.

Further, it was for Buckle an indisputable truth that the 'world of nature' continues to have faith in the existence of 'so-called objective moral truths', which presented indisputable normative moral codes to society. Instead morality is only dependent on the speaker's view or descriptions of a moral matter and is therefore subjective.<sup>75</sup> Buckle argues that the state and its churches actively suppress the development of the natural sciences and that both institutions therefore stand in the way of true moral progress based on social, economic and scientific evolution. Clearly this indicated that Buckle felt society would be far better off if *civitas* and *clerus* would take a much more marginal role in the development of social affairs. The liberal and positivistic elements in Buckle's position together with the framework of materialism constituted a serious methodological and ideological challenge to event history, without acknowledging that instead of idealising the state, the statesmen and wars, he was idealising the method of empirical sciences, natural evolution and progress. Moral scepticism as an ideal, does of course immediately create a difficulty; that of verifying its own stance as non-ideological.

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<sup>73</sup> Droysen (1972) p. 78.

<sup>74</sup> On the history of historicism see (1957) pp. 351-360. Highly critical towards the historicist *Weltanschauung* was Schied (1964).

The subscribers to Buckle's modern view even went so far as to degrade Theodor Mommsen's and Ernst Curtius' highly valuable contributions to Roman and Greek history as mere collections of anecdotes and bedside-table readings. They held instead that the method of proper historical studies should follow the scientific laws of development of matter and nature.<sup>76</sup> We shall see later in this part how this spirit influenced *Nationalökonomie* and *Geschichtswissenschaft* towards the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Some similarities to Bücher's position, especially to his model of the 'stages of economic development' may perhaps already become apparent. However, it would be a mistake to assume that the Prussian School and its followers resorted solely to fury and indignation about the positivistic and materialistic methods. The challenges of cultural history and sociology against the traditional historiography not only have their roots in the success of positivism in England, but are partly due to a highly developed and undoubtedly sophisticated, but at the same time inward looking, Rankean idealistic methodology of historical studies in Germany with its continuation by Droysen.<sup>77</sup>

If positivism and materialism aimed to distort the idealist separation between the world of nature and the world of human affairs and aspired to supersede the epistemic and methodological distinction between natural sciences and historical studies with a universally applicable and all incorporating 'scientific method', then surely it was practical for the Rankean adherents to focus mainly on a criticism of this new method. Indeed Droysen not only clarified the idealistic position, but also firmly criticised the positivistic method. In doing so, he provided a valuable basis for Meyer's writings on the philosophy of history; Meyer's harsh criticism of Bücher's 'economic-theoretical' model provides the basis of an explanation to Meyer's allegedly modernising view of antiquity. However, a look into Droysen's method of *Verstehen* ('reflective understanding') will also highlight Droysen's and Meyer's methodologically questionable presuppositions.

Droysen's criticism stems merely from his argument that positivism and materialism are missing the point about the nature of historical studies and proper historical understanding. Droysen rejected Buckle's demands for a methodological reorientation of historical studies. For Droysen, such claims and demands are entirely unjustifiable, since the contemplation of human nature, as existing only artificially as political beings capable of living without moral and civic guidance was to him an

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<sup>75</sup> See Fuchs (1994).

<sup>76</sup> See Demandt (1998) p. 88, n31. Here especially Mone (1858) p. 56.

<sup>77</sup> See Oestreich (1969) p. 325.

inconceivable and frightening idea.<sup>78</sup> In this respect Droysen argued that Buckle's approach is fundamentally flawed and oversimplified. He asserted that positivism simply measures the degree of progress in human civilisation of Buckle's kind merely quantitatively, in terms of 'the consumption of soup' of a nation for example.<sup>79</sup> For Droysen progress manifests itself not through application of materialistic deterministic methods or quantifiers, but through the state of collective/national '*Erkenntnis*' or internalisation of patriotic norms. This '*Erkenntnis*' does not only depend on the level of technical and economic progress within society, but also on the efficiency of government, its nationalistic determination and control of social affairs. Proper progress is therefore mainly confined to the 'political' and spiritual and not to the economical or social. We must not, however, commit the mistake of reading Droysen's critique on Buckle entirely as a mere outburst of patriotic feelings. Undoubtedly his openly nationalistic bias formed a central premise in his defence of event history, which as we saw, was echoed in Meyer too. However, Droysen leaned also heavily on Kant's idealism, which emphasised individual responsibility, moral duty and free will. The historian is therefore not simply the impartial investigator who connects events with one another by showing their causal connections; by nature he cannot disconnect himself from the 'moral powers' – state, church, education and vocation. Droysen argued with Kant that free will could only be truly exercised if the subject comprehends itself as autonomous and rationally respects the moral law, which presupposes the right system of justice and moral ethos. This foundation, he thought, was best provided with the realisation of the Prussian-German nation state, but not with a homogenous super state (*Universalstaat*). Droysen also remained firmly Rankean by maintaining that the naturalistic-deterministic method of Buckle condensed into some sort of statistical law, formula or table discards the most important aspect in history, the particular event and individual. He claimed that, for example, 'those laws, which might explain that out of a thousand mothers, up to twenty or thirty of them giving birth without being married' is a rather meaningless observation, since it ignores the moral implications of such a fact.'<sup>80</sup> As the natural sciences operate in the categories of space, history operates in the realm of time. In opposition to the naturalists, Droysen maintained that the laws of physics are not extendable into the world of human affairs. The historian aims to understand the particular and not the general. It is of course possible to predict by making

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<sup>78</sup> See Droysen (1937) p. 398 f.

<sup>79</sup> Droysen (1937) p. 399.

<sup>80</sup> Droysen (1937) p. 399.

empirical inferences; for example, during continuous heavy rainfall significantly fewer people may leave their homes to watch an outdoor football match, but this does not stop me from enjoying the walk to the ground even if it is likely that I might fall ill with a cold or the game might be called off due to a waterlogged pitch. The task of the historian is not to ignore my behaviour as abnormal and to explain why everyone else stayed in; this may be the task of the sociologist or the mass psychologist. It is rather important to evaluate the significance of this single event and what impact it may have had on the course of history – in this rather trivial example. This is what the method of *Verstehen* is mainly about – reflective understanding of the particular event in its contribution to the practical realisation of particular ideas. Droysen himself makes this clear by pointing out that in history we are looking for the ‘changing elements in what remains unchanged...What moves and influences history is not the motion of the atoms, but the will, which is derived from self-consciousness and determined by it. In addition, the co-operatively operating will of the many, which, in this community, in this family spirit, in this collective spirit and nationhood etc., have a common self-consciousness that acts analogously (to the individual spirit).’<sup>81</sup> Droysen’s statement emphasises a strict detachment between nature and spirit, between the world of necessities and the world of freedom, between the world of nature and the world of human affairs – a separation which is apparent throughout Droysen’s theory. The positivistic historiography will of course always deny this distinction and continued to declare this idealistic paradigm as obsolete and, in the case of the materialists, as ideologically laden.<sup>82</sup>

Droysen acknowledged of course that many elements, which make our existence possible, are dependent on nature and may be explained by the natural sciences. However, this causal and universalisable explanation is simply different from what the historian attempts to do. The naturalistic or determinist explanation of an event may have its value, for the biologist or physicist, but does not offer the historian an appropriate epistemological basis, since he does not seek to subsume crucial individual element in history under universal principles. Droysen elucidates the difference between the world of nature and the world of human affairs by stating; ‘not with the wood and tin of the instruments, but with the acoustics of the tones and harmonies, which come from them, is a Beethoven symphony explained and understood.’. And further, ‘the elements which can

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<sup>81</sup> Droysen (1937) p. 12.

<sup>82</sup> Max Müller, for example, tried to construct even classical philology as a natural science, which was not only rejected by Droysen, but earned him mockery too. See Demandt (1998) p. 89 n44.

be measured with the method of the natural sciences belong to the material conditions of the historic life, but they are not the life itself.’<sup>83</sup> The method of *Verstehen* therefore incorporates the results of the natural sciences as one element, but it is and ought not to be subsumed by them.

Droysen’s historical method consists all together of three steps of comprehension. First, the heuristic step, which means working through the material by using the results of the natural sciences as assisting sciences (*‘Hilfswissenschaften’*) that are at the historian’s free disposal, for example, archaeology or economic history. The second step is the analysis and criticism of the results in order to achieve more certainty. The third and most important phase is ‘interpretation’, which lies in the heart of *‘Verstehen’*.<sup>84</sup> Like Meyer, Droysen understood interpretation in a pragmatic way. Where there is enough substantial evidence, causal conclusions can be easily drawn, where there are few analogues, there motives may have to be invented in order to understand the importance of an event.<sup>85</sup> However, this is not to say that Droysen endorsed the method of conjectural history as some enlightenment historians did.<sup>86</sup> It seems that Droysen’s aim was to defend and reinforce the validity of teleological explanation of particular action in the light of his contemporary moral and political challenges. This is not to say that every action achieves its end or is of equal weight. The difficulty for the historian is to decide from which moral and epistemological stance he has to adopt to demarcate the historically ‘outstanding’ or ‘important’ personality or event. For Droysen this value was the level of realisation of the general will or spirit of a nation, expressed in the quality of its collective actions (e.g. Prussian-German nationalism) and more significantly, in the quality of political and moral leadership by its statesmen and bureaucratic institutions such as the church, military and universities. The primary driving forces in history are moral ideas, which ‘develop in history, but these moral ideas do grow and unfold themselves only through the human being in history. That they continue and grow in that manner is the meaning of history in its sole contents.’<sup>87</sup> Although the emergence of guiding moral ideas, which can become political dogmas in a state, should always be examined in this political context, this is not applicable in respect of class struggle and degree of satisfaction of material needs. The

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<sup>83</sup> Droysen (1937) p. 13.

<sup>84</sup> See Spieler (1970) p. 75 f.

<sup>85</sup> Droysen (1937) p. 154, p. 340 ff.

<sup>86</sup> See for example the methodological approach by the Scottish enlightenment historian, William Robertson, who aimed to defend the conjectural approach in historiography. For more detail see Francesconi (1999).

<sup>87</sup> Droysen (1937) p. 181.

perspective of the level of realisation is present in the degree of national unity, loyalty to the state and obedience to morality.

Droysen's approach has of course its difficulties, as he himself was quite happy to point out: 'it is a delightful occurrence that in all important questions of our science [*Wissenschaft*] there is discord amongst its masters, that one operates differently from one another factually and methodologically. Again and again the question arises whether the historian should work artistically or scientifically or both, whether he has to be impartial or is at least entitled to be biased towards the good and the true, whether historical inquiry has to search for laws or whether he has to be satisfied with the facts. The lively interest for history that is apparent everywhere, has brought a wild variety of theories onto the market. Journalists, who represent the opinion of the so-called educated public, try to tell us how we should go about in our scientific research.'<sup>88</sup>

However, this quote outlines a problematic position. On the one hand, Droysen was welcoming the debate on method and objectives of historical studies. On the other hand, he seems to deny 'the so-called educated public' an opinion how history should proceed. Any criticism from a non-academic or non-German (although this is not explicitly maintained in this quote) seems to be unwelcome. Also, and we can draw here a parallel to Ranke, it seems to be difficult for Droysen to prove that the guiding historical ideas, which the historian should embrace in his assessment of the historically important, are not just important to him and his audience. It is certainly possible to accept that religious and political ideas have consciously and subconsciously an influence over our actions. However, it is difficult to see what kind of ideas do in fact trigger and dominate actions, which ideas are worth pursuing because they may bring us closer to the truth, to the good and to God. Even if it does not constitute a great difficulty to see Droysen's problem in distinguishing clearly between the subjective motives of our actions and the objective course of history, the difficulty exists in justifying the criteria for the historian to call a certain idea objective in terms of their observable dominants and goodness in history.

The historian is simply not a supreme historical being, who can free himself from political and ideological temptations. Droysen must have been aware of this, but a certain academic arrogance and prejudice with regard to the unique position of historical studies amongst the academic disciplines and 'outsider' voices remains. It was continued and elaborated in Meyer's 'Anthropology'.<sup>89</sup> After all, it seems somehow puzzling that whilst

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<sup>88</sup> Droysen (1977) p. 3.

<sup>89</sup> Recently on Droysen's *Historik* see Ribbe (1989), Momigliano (1991) and Nippel (1993).

both Droysen and Meyer maintained a plurality of explanation; that different subjects operate with different methods and concepts, they both maintained the superiority of the historical sciences over the social and, to a degree, the natural sciences.

*iv. Historical Studies and Germany in the 1890s*

Although the Prussian School faced a series of methodological and political challenges which originated mainly from outside Germany's universities, the totalitarian and all-inclusiveness of Bismarck's government combined with its presumptive and often extreme nationalism gave Droysen's historicist method up to the 1890s an almost uncontested position in ancient history. However, alongside the previously discussed ongoing 'national question' in politics and the increasing influence of positivism and materialism into German political thought, the academic world during last decade of the 19<sup>th</sup> century was increasingly divided. On the one side, it crystallised itself into a rather rigid and at times snobbish historicism primarily within the discipline of history. On the other side stood those political enthusiasts in favour of modern methods, free trade, progress and liberal philosophies and their colleagues in mostly new academic and semi-academic disciplines. This factor was primarily responsible for the bitterness and the polemic course of the debate between Bücher and Meyer.

In addition, the so-called 'crisis' in historical studies was possibly brought about as an effect of the frequent and devastating economic depressions in Germany as a result of which the entrepreneurial optimism of the 1890s suffered many setbacks. The economic and social crisis, which lasted more than 15 years, resulted in even sharper class divisions, which created a powerful but still politically discriminated against working class movement. The rapid urban and agricultural industrialisation created previously unknown social and cultural phenomena, which demanded explanation and consideration. The poverty of the working class created social tensions resulting in an increase of petty crime, social disobedience and religious disenfranchisement. The dramatic growth in mass production and technological advances created for the first time in German history a consumer and entertainment culture for the middle classes, which was until then, known only in England and France. New industries emerged such as tourism, transport and media.<sup>90</sup> For example, mass sporting events in football and athletics, aeroplane and weaponry shows and advances in telecommunication gave almost everyone something to be astounded about and entertained by. Regardless of frequent setbacks, this signalled the end of a bitter and long lasting economic crisis and rang in the beginning of a new era for Germany.

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<sup>90</sup> Wehler (1975) and very recently in respect of alternative methodological approaches see Wehler (1998).

Politically the beginning of such a new era began perhaps with Bismarck's resignation in 1891. The latter event was accompanied by fundamental political and social reforms, which the 'Iron Chancellor' had to initiate towards the end of his twenty-year highly praised and bitterly condemned spell in office,<sup>91</sup> which resulted for the time being in a strengthening of the liberal and positivistic forces within politics and academia. It seems that the end of Bismarck's era coincides somehow with the beginning of the decline of the predominate position of the historical studies amongst the 'spiritual' or 'human sciences' (*Geisteswissenschaften*). The word 'crisis' is often mentioned in connection with the history of historiography of the late 19<sup>th</sup> century. Perhaps with Hegel's death the dream of objective idealism - that of retaining confidence in achieving a universally objective and consistent *Weltanschauung* - finally faded. Ideologically, the last serious attempt to create a universal system in philosophy, the Romanticism and patriotism of the early 19<sup>th</sup> century that inspired the revolution of 1848/49 turned sourly into Prussia's imperialistic ambitions, anti-Catholicism and anti-Semitism not only in the new Germany, but also throughout Europe.<sup>92</sup> Those historians disillusioned with the Ranke's promise of history to discover 'how it really was', tended to be those scholars that were impressed and almost bedazzled by the idea of scientific and economic progress as the sole key for social evolution and change, found themselves at home amongst the liberals and even amongst social democrats. The increasing political disunity amongst Germany's academics fuelled the demands for a reorientation of historical studies. In sharp contrast to the historicism of Treitschke, Sybel and Droysen, its advocates based their views on hidden psychological forces within the human mind or on the underlying material forces within society as expressed in civil unrest and class struggle.

Regarding the situation at the German universities, political or traditional history had, as we saw, previously enjoyed a supreme and unchallenged position in German thought, which perhaps resulted from its unsolved 'national question' and the quest for national identity. The continuous predominance of the Prussian School beyond 1871 was a clear sign that German society and the organisation of its state was still controlled by the aristocracy, which saw large parts of that society especially in the north and the east still remaining under a feudal economic and social structure. This is not to say that society and its institutions did not change according to increasing versatility of the economy, leaving

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<sup>91</sup> The social reforms, such as the National Insurance System are often used as an example for his achievements. See Wehler (1975).

<sup>92</sup> On Bismarck's failure to win the '*Kulturkampf*' see Ross (1998).

the aristocracy and the upper bourgeoisie as sole winners of the 'revolution from the top of society', regardless of the economic concessions that had to be made. However, Bismarck's reforms of 1873 achieved a kind of 'parliamentarianism *à la* Bonapart', which left rural Germany largely unaffected in its peasant state.<sup>93</sup> The static and conservative organisation of the state, on the one hand, the fast progressing development of capitalism on the other hand, did not resolve class conflict, but had an adverse affect on political and intellectual unity. Some of the more liberal voices resounded amongst the newly founded and increasingly credible science of political economy. Its first liberal scholars, Rodbertus, Bücher and Lujo Brentano used a series of different approaches, which differed substantially from the method of political and military history used by their colleagues in historical studies.<sup>94</sup>

Although the revolutionary years of 1848/49 displayed impressively the mounting difficulties of the old aristocratic order in Germany in coping with the development of the capitalist system, its political deal with the bourgeoisie had prolonged and stabilised its power, even though the uprisings of those years had shown a high degree of organisation.<sup>95</sup> What led to the deep crisis of the old order was not simply a question of socio-economic failure, famine and reluctance to implement political reform. Problems of food distribution, overproduction and urban squalor resulted from fast growing, functioning or disfunctioning markets. The bourgeoisie, who had on previous occasions, at least during the American and French Revolution, idealised equality of all men and propagated civil liberties, had, towards the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, positioned itself against the working class movement and distanced itself conspicuously from any kind of socialist and communist ideals. The German bourgeoisie allied themselves with the aristocracy, whilst in France and England they kept a more liberal and politically independent profile. The peculiar economic effect, as Marx in particular predicted, was an evident concentration of capital in the form of large trusts and oligopolies establishing a whole new world of industrial concentration and production, which was unknown in scope and in its social quality and implications (e.g. the large scale concentration of bought labour to unbearably low wages).

The years of the 'Great Depression' 1873-1896 even benefited the increase in the monopoly structure of the economies of Germany and also in the United States.

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<sup>93</sup> See Weber (1991).

<sup>94</sup> An almost monumental work on this subject Brauntal (1966/67).

Politically, the emergence of trusts and cartels in banking and industry favoured the organisation of the proletariat, but led also to a material differentiation amongst the working class and the bourgeoisie, which resulted in a less uniform anti-capitalist line inside the working class movements. Certain industries and banks could increasingly afford to pay higher wages than other industries. Office workers were increasingly divided by a growing inequality of income and benefits, which created the claim that the working class itself was split into first and second class workers. The modernisation of the countryside with soaring productivity and profit increases during the years after the revolution until the mid 1870s helped Germany's aristocracy to keep a dominant hold on German politics. The bourgeoisie had its economic basis only in the cities and since it lost its ties with the proletariat, had to co-operate with the aristocracy in order to gain political and economic concessions.<sup>96</sup>

Despite a tendency towards political monopolisation and ever-stronger ties between bourgeoisie and aristocracy in Germany during the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, it would be too simplistic to assume a homogenous development of the class structure. The varieties of political and intellectual arguments are present in the parliamentary debates, in the politics of the German banks and in the scholarly debates at the universities. This is a fact, which suggests clearly that Germany's intellectuals, politicians and businessmen were not just a vehicle or mechanism to maintain the monarchy.<sup>97</sup> The alliance between '*Roggen und Eisen*', 'rye and iron', after 1878/79 as Alfred Rosenberg called it, was more or less an attempt to strengthen the German nation state under the rule of Prussia. There were few other common interests between aristocracy and bourgeoisie apart from retaining power and increased capital accumulation, but there was obviously still enough power to hold back the working class movement in its disunited but continuous attempt to overthrow capitalism.<sup>98</sup>

In this historical context a certain term reoccurs very frequently in newspaper articles and propaganda brochures - the 'social question' or '*soziale Frage*'. It refers to the situation of the working class in German society during the second part of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Although the working class was similar to the developed nations like France and Britain

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<sup>95</sup> About the importance and the background of the revolution in Germany see Schmidt (1972) and Marquardt (1974).

<sup>96</sup> For more details see Wehler (1972), pp. 24-30 and Böhme (1972).

<sup>97</sup> For an excellent overview on the political and economic changes and forces during that time see Wehler (1976) pp. 131-148.

<sup>98</sup> Rosenberg (1967) p. 164. The 'black and blue' alliance also became economically visible in the form of price dictatorship and the creation of 'coal cartel' in the Ruhr area.

high in numbers after 1848/49 and in parts similarly well-organised, the late industrialisation of Germany and the apparent programmatic opposition against socialism and its leaders, made it very difficult for German Social Democrats (including the trade unions) to achieve a grade of flexibility, organisation and support known to Britain and France.<sup>99</sup> This lack of unity and flexibility was about to change with the rapid industrialisation and its effects on the deep economic recession of the 1870s and 80s, which gained the German working class movement a leading role, as exemplified by the Second International of 1889 in Paris. A clear indication of the new spirit amongst the German working class movement was unity-congress of Gotha in 1875.<sup>100</sup> Bismarck's 'Anti-Socialist Laws' of 1878-1890 had certainly had an adverse effect on the progressing organisation of the movement, which had resulted in the parliamentary success of 1884 and 1890. Bismarck and the conservative parties were unable to push back the Social Democrats either inside or outside the parliament. The idea was now to win them over, to partially incorporate and eventually split the Social Democrats over Bismarck's political reforms, which succeeded in the form of a national/nationalistic orientation of these political parties to a considerable degree.<sup>101</sup>

The support of the Bismarck government given by a large proportion of the Social Democrats was bought with the 'social security laws' (*Sozialgesetzgebung*), which marked the introduction of a National Insurance system, which was in its complexity unmatched in Europe. It is however no secret that right up until 1880 Bismarck strongly opposed any demands for shortening the working week, the introduction of tight safety regulation and the abolition of child and Sunday work, to name a few examples. The introduction of social reforms, the national insurance, pension schemes and school reforms were, as Bismarck himself admitted, not introduced to relieve the indisputable human hardship and misery amongst large parts of the working classes, but in order to create a stronger national identity, which was capable of supporting his imperialistic aspirations regardless of any social divide. By doing so, he would be able to marginalise the mounting social pressures

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<sup>99</sup> Even Bismarck's 'social laws' (*Sozialistengesetze*) of 1878 could not break or stop the continuous organisation capability to act of the working class movements. See Engelberg (1967) p. 145 f.

<sup>100</sup> It is not the task here to judge or explain the revolutionary aspects and opportunistic parts of this program. In despite of all criticism it plays an important part in the theoretical considerations of the socialist movement. See Marx' 'Critique of the Gotha Program' in Marx (1933). See also Engelberg (1971) p. 143.

<sup>101</sup> Engelberg (1967) pp. 186-187, p. 238 f., and on the development of the Social Democratic Party in Germany see the bibliography in Wehler (1971), Ritter (1963) and more recently Guttsman (1981).

onto the aristocratic-upper bourgeois pact.<sup>102</sup> Large parts of the social democratic movements and left-wing liberalism clearly followed Bismarck in his imperialist ambitions, which the German aristocracy was longing to realise politically and the bourgeoisie economically. The rebirth of the German nation under Prussia's governance, the breath-taking industrial catch-up with Europe's leading industrial nations like France and Britain was accompanied by a rather backward, polarised and dictatorial political system, which on a whole could not leave the academic world unaffected. Indeed demands were raised from almost every political section to make the human sciences (*Gesteswissenschaften*) more useful and subservient to contemporary affairs and questions of national priority. The internal quarrels amongst historians and the external political and methodological challenges led at the beginning of the 1890s to what frequently has been called 'the crisis in historical studies' (*Geschichtswissenschaften*)<sup>103</sup> - the once so eminent, sublime and lofty discipline.

It is already apparent that the polemic course of the Bücher-Meyer Controversy was not simply a political matter, nor was it merely a methodological dispute, but rather a combination of both, which was mirrored in the conservative nationalistic orientation of Germany's universities and the urge of liberalism to create an academic self-image.

Most institutes of higher education, especially those on former Prussian territory remained largely under the influence of the once progressive ideal of the enlightenment of a peacefully unified and strong federal German nation state.<sup>104</sup> At that time the academies and universities in smaller federal states (e.g. Leipzig, Jena, Heidelberg, and Freiburg) had, despite their humanistic tradition, in practice very little autonomy in education affairs. In fact the political task of these institutions was to accommodate scientific and technological progress, but also to educate and recruit obedient civil servants and bureaucrats. Professors and lecturers were civil servants and clearly not put into office in order to resent and undermine the newly built federal system, but were instructed to support and further the policies of Bismarck's government. Since the universities were largely politically fire-walled, serious political resistance could therefore only occur from organisations outside the academic world, but hardly from within.<sup>105</sup> Paulsen even went as far as to claim that the

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<sup>102</sup> See again Wehler's excellent representation (1972) p. 459 ff. and Wehler (1975). See also Faulenbach (1980) for a comprehensive study of German History reflected in its historiography between the *Kaisereich* and National Socialism.

<sup>103</sup> Metz (1984) p. 6 f. and Iggers (1984) p. 21 f.

<sup>104</sup> For the history of the German universities during that period see Oestreich (1969) and Ringer (1990).

<sup>105</sup> For a favourable comment on the alliance and relationship between new industries such as the chemical and electrical industry and scientific research at German universities see Engel (1959) p. 352 f. See also

German universities and their curricula 'concerning the whole academic scholarship, represents a kind of intellectual aristocracy, including praetors and teachers, judges and civil servants, doctors and engineers, who gained access through the universities into the well-taught and prestigious professions. As a whole, they all form a kind of "office aristocracy" (*Amtsadel*), of whom the large majority was incorporated into the substructures of local and federal state government.'<sup>106</sup> That not all citizens were suitable for such positions, especially those from poorer backgrounds, was openly acknowledged. To this extent the political and nationalistic orientation of the curricula was openly encouraged by scholars such as Meyer and Pöhlmann and found a diverse reflection in comments and publications about the state of Germany's education system. Paulsen pointed also out that the initial trend towards liberalisation in the spirit of humanism experienced a severe setback under Bismarck.<sup>107</sup> This created perhaps one significant factor for the establishment of semi-academic circles and organisations, which besides the spreading of popular science often also followed liberal political values.

External opposition to the conservative self-image and internal debates amongst historians were contributing factors in the setting-up of the 'German Historians' Conference' (*Deutscher Historiker Tag*), which has established itself over the last century (since 1893) as an institution of high scholarly and political esteem. Yet although the Conference was intended to foster and further the internal and interdisciplinary debate on historical topics methodological challenges were greeted with little sympathy. Academic 'newcomers' like Karl Bücher and Karl Lamprecht, both scholars at Leipzig, earned themselves little credibility by challenging the established Rankean consensus on method, its general picture of antiquity and its blunt nationalism. That, however, the arguments on both sides, as in many other disputes too, have had a clearly politically motivated content and background, can not be seriously denied by anyone who studies the newspaper reports

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Wehler (1973) p. 129 f. On a good description of the high demand on conformity of the universities in the state sciences (law and political economy), philosophical faculties and the natural sciences.

<sup>106</sup> Paulsen (1902) pp. 149-150 See also Paulsen (1912). Paulsen also highlights the departure from enlightenment and rather liberal ideas of allowing poor, but highly gifted children access to higher education. The German *Gymnasium* paved the way for this very selective and elitist education system Paulsen (1902) p. 161. Paulsen's study, although very complex, shows however also his own political frustration about the right-wing conservative and in his view backward education system.

<sup>107</sup> In the spirit of the republican revolution of 1848/49 in particular fraternity organisations provided and fostered less well off students. Without their protectionism Mommsen and Wilamowitz in Berlin or Nietzsche and Marx in Bonn would have never been able to graduate with an academic degree. See Siemann (1998).

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about these conferences and the remarks of some key participants in their autobiographies in the early years.<sup>108</sup>

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<sup>108</sup> Schumann (1974) p. 54 f.

### 3. Cultural History vs. Political Event History

#### *i. Gothein and Schäfer*

The emerging crisis in German historiography was in some ways a product of the ideological debate and is characteristic of the modern *Zeitgeist* of the Wilhelminian era. However, whole social divisions and ideological disagreements may form an important and informative part of an explanation for the occurrence of the Bücher-Meyer Controversy, but these reasons are not exclusive. The self-image of history as residing above the human sciences was seriously challenged by the psychological, positivistic and partly materialistic methodological approaches and not only from semi- or non-academic circles outside Germany.

The first serious academic calls for a reorientation of historical studies in Germany have their roots in the late 1880s. Dietrich Schäfer's (1845-1929) inaugural lecture 'The intrinsic task of history' (*Das eigentliche Arbeitsgebiet der Geschichte*) of 1888 reiterated the Rankean consensus.<sup>109</sup> Schäfer stated reassuringly, 'the essence of the state is power and politics is the art of maintaining the state....The instruments of power for the state are mainly things of political and military nature.'<sup>110</sup> By highlighting the 'political' as preceding all other human affairs, he claimed that history and its historians ought to enquire into the particular event and should highlight what actions and personalities had a traceable impact on the present.<sup>111</sup> Cultural history, he added, dealt with the rather unimportant banalities of everyday life. In a controversial polemic aimed at Schäfer's essay, Eberhard Gothein (1853-1923) responded critically that the historian should not only focus on 'political event history' (*politische Ereignisgeschichte*), but also on 'cultural history' (*Kulturgeschichte*). He pointed out that the latter concept incorporates not only political and military events, highlighting the glory or demise of its leading figures, but also underlines material conditions and cultural peculiarities.<sup>112</sup> Arguing against the historicist historiography, Gothein also emphasised that the 'chronological tradition' would

<sup>109</sup> See Oestreich (1969) p. 321.

<sup>110</sup> See Schäfer (1888) Cited in Oestreich (1969) p. 327.

<sup>111</sup> Schäfer (1888).

<sup>112</sup> Gothein (1889). Gothein's works in the field of regional economic history may serve us here sufficiently as example. See Gothein (1892).

single out only the results of what went on at a particular time, which leaves the all important political event diminished to one of many factors. Gothein was not prepared to accept that the 'political' elements in history presides over the 'cultural'; instead, he argued that 'event history' reduces history to merely those political ideas and personalities that benefited directly or indirectly from the historical battle.<sup>113</sup>

In reply, Schäfer complained that Gothein's concept of cultural history was entirely focussed on mass movements and by doing so, continuously belittled the achievements of historic personalities. One can of course interpret the holistic approach of both theories as equally reductivist and hypothetical. One may argue that, on the one hand, political event history exaggerates the importance of state leaders and belittles the masses and their culture. On the other hand, one could reply that cultural history belittles individuality and concentrates overmuch on abstract class, mass and cultural movements as well as daily material dispensabilities. It is obvious that Schäfer stood firmly in the tradition of historicism in which the state and its leaders constituted the 'proper' objective of a sound historiographical methodology. For Schäfer, intellectual ideas and political history include and dominate cultural history. Therefore, from Schäfer's point of view, '*Kulturgeschichte*' is only a subordinate part of political history, whereas for Gothein it influences and characterises a specific political structure. Gothein however also held that Droysen's 'History of Prussian Politics' and Sybel's 'Foundation of the German Empire by Wilhelm I' exemplified the cultural approach.<sup>114</sup> It is doubtful, however, that either would have appreciated such a classification.

According to Gothein, the task of proper historical methodology is to uncover the laws of political development, which lie in the cultural and material conditions of society. He concluded by quoting his teacher, Wilhelm Dilthey's '*Einleitung in die Geisteswissenschaften*' ('Introduction to the Human Sciences; an Attempt to lay down the Foundation for the Study of Society and History') that 'the science of the human spirit is only one. If we comprehend it from its *unchanged* basis, then we call it philosophy. If we are looking for the *changing* and the *developing* in history, then this should be called cultural history. '*Tertium non datur*' - there is no third way'.<sup>115</sup> To consider the 'changing' and 'developing' as essential to history was for Gothein and his colleagues a more enlightening approach which influenced economic and regional history.

<sup>113</sup> Gothein (1889) p. 3 ff. On the discussion of the concept of cultural history as opposed to mere political history. Also discussed in Goch (1964) p. 609 ff. and Oestreich (1969) p 326 f..

<sup>114</sup> See Oestreich (1969) p. 329.

It should be added, however, that Gothein did not intend to challenge Ranke's eminence in German historiography publicly. At the 3<sup>rd</sup> 'Conference of German Historians', he criticised Ranke in a carefully-worded manner for not considering adequately the importance of economic aspects in history, but concluded that nevertheless one ought not stand against the forefather of historicism.<sup>116</sup> The newly emerged theory of *Kulturgeschichte* had obvious links to the concept of social history, and criticised the 'static philosophy' of Ranke and its historicist aftermath. The latter branded Ranke's historicism as static, conservative and unscientific. The social or materialistic approach to human history also became increasingly popular. However, it is difficult to see why a deterministic explanation of events under historic laws of development creates a theoretical advantage over political history. How would one better understand events by looking at general trends instead of the effects of individuals or group of individuals? This question was never properly addressed by Gothein and others and was never put to historicism for reply. It seems that there was a good deal of arrogance and over-confidence amongst positivists and materialists which accompanied the 'progressive' and 'optimistic' spirit of what they called a reformed and modern method of historiography, which associated itself swiftly with the empirical sciences and the inductive analysis of the sociologists. By doing so, they not only created a quantitative dispute over the importance of the single event or a political personality in history, but also dissociated themselves qualitatively i.e. methodologically from philology, chronology and philosophy.

Socially and ideologically, Gothein and the liberal minded scholars in his circle intended to disassociate themselves from the aristocratic and conservative establishment at the history departments of the *Reich* - a disassociation which was only tempered by the nationalistic orientation of German politics and academia in the early 1900s. However, not only did new approaches and academic subjects emerge, which dealt with social, economic and cultural phenomena but also the conservative orientated historical studies, ancient history and philology started to enter into, though perhaps reluctantly, the debate and eventually began to compete with the new cultural and social sciences.<sup>117</sup>

Regarding Karl Bücher's position we recall his extensive use of the theory of 'economic stages of development' and his attention to regional economic history. We also stated that political history played a rather small if not insignificant part in his writings.

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<sup>115</sup> Gothein (1889) p. 49.

<sup>116</sup> See Oestreich (1969) p. 355.

<sup>117</sup> See Oestreich (1969) p. 332 f.

Bücher also argued that history might best be comprehended as a process, rather than merely as a sequence of unrelated events. On the other hand, when we consider Meyer's and Beloch's focus on the particular historical phenomenon and remind ourselves of their methodological remarks, it becomes quite clear that the Bücher-Meyer Controversy was part of the wider debate between '*Kulturgeschichte* vs. *politische Ereignisgeschichte*'. This hard fought dispute should also explain the background of Bücher's and Meyer's polemic arguments and their widely differing ideas about the nature and orientation of historical methodology. This is why the disagreement between them has in fact a much greater exemplary importance than was previously admitted by those who are satisfied with an easy branding of this debate as 'primitivism vs. modernism'. In order to add more substance to our claim, we shall try to shed light onto the '*Methodenstreit*' ('dispute over method') - synonymously known as the *Lamprechtstreit* - in historical studies.<sup>118</sup>

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<sup>118</sup> On the situation of historical studies in Germany see for example Hammerstein (1988), Bruch (1989) and Blanke (1991).

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*ii. The 'Lamprechtstreit'*

The ideological and methodological rift between historians of the Rankean tradition and the historical positivists and materialists was displayed openly with the publication of 'provocative' writings by Karl Lamprecht, who sought to develop Eduard Gothein's and Jacob Burckhardt's concept of '*Kulturgeschichte*'. 'Lamprecht especially tried to redefine the relationship between politics (law) and economy.'<sup>119</sup> Despite some publicity surrounding the Gothein-Schäfer dispute, the real scope of the internal disunity of historical methodology came to light most vividly with the '*Lamprechtstreit*'.

In clear opposition to the concept of 'political event history', during the 1890s Karl Lamprecht (1856-1915) suggested an entirely new method of historical analysis. This triggered a series of furious reactions amongst the established historical scholarship, which was unprecedented with regard to intensity and polemic that completely overshadowed the previous discussion on Gothein's thesis.<sup>120</sup>

Lamprecht set out to raise serious doubts over the old event and political elite driven method, which in Lamprecht's eyes vainly attempted to explain the new social phenomena of developing capitalism on the basis of Ranke's old idea of the pre-eminence of political history. In this way, the debate which Lamprecht initiated was driven by the 'social question', and by a changing social and political climate in Germany, but also by his rejection of the method of traditional historiography, which Bücher also opposed.

The debate was provoked by the publication of volume I of Lamprecht's major work '*Deutsche Geschichte*' in 1890. Yet, as we have pointed out, this publication did not demarcate the beginning of the debate about the demands for a reorientation of historical studies. It was rather the culmination of the previously outlined ongoing process of intellectually challenging publications in new and increasingly popular academic disciplines, of which *Nationalökonomie* and psychology are perhaps the most prominent. However, it is rather bewildering how furiously the traditional Rankean-idealistic historiography launched its attacks against Karl Lamprecht. Was it perhaps Lamprecht's

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<sup>119</sup> Viikari (1977) p. 110.

<sup>120</sup> Iggers (1974) p. 258. For a biographical sketch on Lamprecht see Viikari (1977) pp. 123-132. For an overview on the literature of the debate can be found in Seifert (1925). An almost complete list of Lamprecht's writing appeared in Schönbaum (1955) pp. 7-21. See also Oestreich (1969) p. 321.

personality, his blunt manner of criticism or was it a particular publication of his, which made him the central figure of the dispute? It is difficult to reach a definite conclusion.<sup>121</sup>

The approach of Gothein and Buckle as well as some positivists and materialists had a relatively unthreatening character and was not seen to challenge the historicism predominance seriously. Lamprecht's '*Kulturgeschichte*' was taken more seriously. The Rankean tradition must have felt considerably under threat by this and related approaches as it feared the demise of the essential role given to political and individualistic elements in human history being drowned in the anonymous ocean of world historical and material processes. The demise of the well-established historicist scholarship is to an extent symptomatic for the political downfall of Germany's aristocracy and its 'noble' ethos.

Already in 1885, with his publication 'German Economic Life in the Middle Ages', Karl Lamprecht had attempted to avoid simply stringing together events and political decisions, emphasising instead common elements that these events apparently share with each other. Essentially, Lamprecht argued that these common elements form qualitatively new factors, which in their entirety create the basis of any historical process and are unlike the dominant historical ideas, observable in the day-to-day reality of a society.<sup>122</sup> In academia his stance found hardly any positive acknowledgement with many of his future opponents making sarcastic remarks about Lamprecht's position especially after the publication of the first volume of his *Deutsche Geschichte*.<sup>123</sup>

Lamprecht defended his position by arguing that the historicist tradition employed an entirely 'descriptive methodology', which evaluates 'how it really was' only from the perspective or interest of the historian.<sup>124</sup> This forms an element of an ideological critique, which accuses traditional historiography of committing a fallacy. Firstly, it tries to explain a particular event with concepts which are derived from modern concepts. Secondly, Lamprecht criticised the lack of methodological discussion over the selection of particular historical event. In the light of the apparent absence of such considerations he labelled the historicist historiography of Droysen, Sybel and Treitschke as one-sided, since it intends only to give descriptions of jurisprudential and institutional history. A proper

<sup>121</sup> On Lamprecht's position within the German historiography and achievements see Heuss (1957) pp. 309-312.

<sup>122</sup> See Metz (1984) p. 5 ff.

<sup>123</sup> Max Lenz in a letter to a relative moaned 'What do you have to say about this Opus! This man does not seem to be sane anymore. What he oracles about the Germanic original couple is indeed close to higher comedy...I can imagine quite well Below's smiley face. I can recommend to you perhaps the introduction to and the paragraph about maternity protection, which is suitable as humorous literature for Christmas'. Cited in Oestreich (1969) p. 331 n44.

<sup>124</sup> Lamprecht (1895) p. 295.

historiographical method would not simply give descriptions of 'how it really was', but would commit itself to an inquiry into the evolutionary tendencies and development of particular institutions in order to uncover the underlying structure of the historical process.<sup>125</sup> Although Lamprecht's criticism is not well structured, his aim was to establish a new concept of 'world history' (*Weltgeschichte*), a concept which relied solely upon the notion of development and evolution in history - an elucidation of economic, social and legal transformation. The critique and rejection of the historicist tradition played an essential part in his project. To Lamprecht the so called historical event and its reporters are only small parts of the whole collective-psychological process and sub-processes, by which the individual is amalgamated by overpowering historical forces. Thus, *Kulturgeschichte* is for Lamprecht not only a methodological concept, but also a new and revolutionary view of human history. It is the history of the whole of society and not 'just' of some separated and non-connected events with greatly exaggerated and unjustified emphasis on the centrality of certain ingenious historic personalities, and on the state in history. Economy, politics, social movements and culture should rather be seen as largely interdependent factors and should not be separated from one another in the 'proper' and systematic historical analysis. This holistic view of world history analyses the state of economy and of society; these are the two main causes of what he called a historical event or moment.<sup>126</sup>

Lamprecht's frequent use of terms such as 'social movements' and 'class struggle' earned him even heavier criticism and angry remarks from the historicists, of which Lamprecht's colleague at Leipzig, Georg von Below, was perhaps the most prominent. Contemporaries such as Below, Lenz and Meinecke accused Lamprecht as early as 1896 of collaborating with materialism.<sup>127</sup> The Marxist historiography, which was still in its early days, did adopt at least some of Lamprecht's propositions and was certainly less dismissive and prejudiced than Below. Grounds for Below's criticism emerged from Lamprecht's openly declared sympathies for aspects of Marxist analysis. On the contrary, this was sincerely welcomed by leading thinkers of the social democrats and Marxist movement, as it was beginning to leave a mark on historical studies, which was previously simply not the case.<sup>128</sup> However, even if Lamprecht saw some useful elements in Marxism,

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<sup>125</sup> See Lamprecht (1895) p. 295.

<sup>126</sup> See Lamprecht (1896).

<sup>127</sup> Oestreich (1969) p. 251 n122 ff.

<sup>128</sup> Iggers (198 p. 26, mentions the importance of Ludo Hartmann's *Vierteljahrschrift für Sozial und Wirtschaftsgeschichte*, which attempted to be a serious international platform for social and economic

Below's accusations were unjust. Lamprecht was never a committed Marxist; he objected to the Marxist dialectical-historical analysis of society in that it singled out class struggle as being the engine of progress of human history and focused solely on the socio-economic factors. In the light of recent discussion about a possibly wide-ranging misrepresentation of Marx's concept of history and development due to Engels' and Kautsky's modernisation and application of his theory their own for ideological purposes, it seems doubtful whether Lamprecht's criticism really applies to Marx or more to Kautsky and Engels.<sup>129</sup> Perhaps a brief glance at Lamprecht's position should explain more widely the hostility and hype about Lamprecht's method.

According to Lamprecht, what creates society as a whole is more than just the mechanically interconnecting parts. It is cultural coherence, connection or common context of all these factors that creates the historical. The Prussian School was keen to defend the 'Rankean consensus', and the Marxists were stressing the importance of the economic and material sphere in society. Regardless of all sympathies with the latter position, Lamprecht believed that both schools were based on false and misleading propositions. According to his understanding, each needed to individually develop a scientific method for historical studies. In particular the Prussian School with its 'insisting backwards looking and eclectic approach' towards social and cultural states and events, fails in its attempt to be scientific.<sup>130</sup> Here political event history, Lamprecht objected, is only able to describe what has happened in respect of what the traditional historian holds to be the 'guiding historical ideas', but the historicist is unable to bring events into a wider explanatory context of social 'states' which caused them. While arguing against his archenemy, Below, Lamprecht emphasised that what is historically important are the processes and states, which allow an understanding of 'how things came about' and not simply 'how they were in the past'.<sup>131</sup>

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history. This journal, despite some of its more positivistic orientated contributors, such as Hartmann himself and the Belgian historian Henri Pirenne, published also essays by well-known conservative historians such as Georg von Below, (Lamprecht's arch enemy) as well as essays by Theodor Mommsen, who did not support Lamprecht's method.

<sup>129</sup> See very recently Steger (1999). Also esp. Meikle 'Engels and the Enlightenment Reading of Marx' in Steger (1999) pp. 87-107. Compare also Steger 'Friedrich Engels and the Origin of German Revisionism in Steger (1999) pp. 181-196.

<sup>130</sup> See Lamprecht (1896b) p. 12.

<sup>131</sup> See Laum, (1937) p. 2 ff. Here we are perhaps reminded about Marx, who similarly held that any descriptive science is meaningless if we are not able to evaluate its results, its usefulness for society and for the individual. Traditional history for Marx too was something solely based on historical figures, events and their devoted reporters. The interpretation of certain data followed the pattern being instigated and directed by the interest of the ruling class. That they may form a collective spirit or identity was for Marx determined by the positioning of the individuals towards the means of production. However, unlike Marx, Lamprecht

One must however not misinterpret Lamprecht's emphasis on historic processes as being essentialist and teleological, as Marx saw it. According to Lamprecht, historical processes, which he calls 'states', are to be regarded as the historical life and not simply as preconditions of events. The successful analysis of such states presupposes comparison of different historical periods and ages with each other. Lamprecht defines these 'states' as the sum of what has existed in the past and what lives on from it. Secondly, this sum of what has been continuously created, was brought about by three forces: firstly, the 'general will' ('*Gesamtwille*'), second, the 'general intellect' ('*Gesamtintellekt*') and finally the 'general sentiment' ('*Gesamtempfindung*') of a nation. Lamprecht added that the expressions of the 'general will', which are reflected in cultural identity of a nation, are somehow more important and consistent than expressions of the 'individual will' of the historic personalities.<sup>132</sup> This position forms the basis of Lamprecht's argument to justify a reading of history as the history of cultural and thereby social states, which is the underlying methodological feature in Lamprecht's main work *Deutsche Geschichte*, which took encyclopaedic proportions with its eighteen volumes.<sup>133</sup>

In detail, Lamprecht aimed to focus his historical analysis on the cultural and to an extent social psyche of a nation, in particular the German Nation, its cultural realities, literature, art, social movements and so forth, since these are the factors that predominantly influence and progress history. The potential attractiveness and utility of such an approach to support nationalism becomes quickly apparent.

Lamprecht's method can perhaps be regarded as the first effort to reconcile the individual and event-driven reading of history with collective, social and cultural phenomena under one roof. This later received the term Historical Sociology, a subject which only became popular with the establishment of the social sciences as largely independent departments from the historical sciences in the 1950s.<sup>134</sup> Yet, despite the epistemological difficulties faced in reconciling the two positions, it seems logical to assume that Lamprecht's method must at least have had support from nationalistic minded academics, given his openly nationalistic attitudes. However, he was unable to gain support for his 'third way' - the unique combination of positivism, national liberalism and

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emphasised the steady general development of history, which leaves the individual in the background and emphasises in its historic explanation only the 'underlying social and cultural forces'.

<sup>132</sup> See Lamprecht (1896a) p. 26.

<sup>133</sup> First edition appeared between 1891-1909 of which only the first five volumes were critically reviewed, but heavily criticised. See for example, Below (1898). For a good summary about the contributors to the debate around Lamprecht see also Seifert (1925), Engelberg (1965) and Viikari (1977)..

<sup>134</sup> On a detailed study of the subject matter and its history see Skocpol (1984).

materialism.<sup>135</sup> This would seem to imply that amongst German intellectuals, patriotism and nationalism was somehow seen as the default or standard position, which earned no one an extra bonus in popularity or even protected any scholar from being criticised for challenging the established method in the historical sciences - historicism. Whether or not Lamprecht really intended to find a compromise between historicism, national liberalism and materialism we may never really know, but to pick and chose the best elements of these three distinct theories and to create one all-reconciling position does perhaps invite malicious and angry responses.<sup>136</sup> It is questionable in any case whether the materialistic elements in Lamprecht's theory are not just part of a slightly modified historicist position. One could hold against Lamprecht that he simply idealised a certain 'psychological state' of a culture, if such a state really exists, whilst the historicist idealised the uniqueness of the historic personalities.

Since Lamprecht did not intend to belittle the importance of the state as the highest form of human community, but simply maintained that political history does not preside over cultural history and is indeed only part of culture, it seems that Lamprecht's emphasis is only different in scope from the historicist approach, and that his methodological challenge is nothing more than an expression of a particular political agenda.<sup>137</sup> Lamprecht's analysis of those 'general states' was for him solely a matter of empirical analysis, which is centred upon the material, social, economic, constitutional and bureaucratic peculiarities of a nation. However, even if the analysis of those states can be achieved empirically, it is not clear from where those 'general states' are derived and how they can be epistemically justified. Lamprecht suggested statistical methods, which represented to him the numerical expression of such steady general/generic developments in the national culture. On the one hand, Lamprecht insisted on a strictly empirical method of investigation and denied any inherent or inborn purpose in human history. On the other hand, he seems to accept that history is inherently a continuously progressing process. This is itself, however, a presupposition that can hardly be proven purely by means of empirical investigation. How can 'inherentness' be proven, if the only means of establishing this truth stems from empirical investigation and lies therefore outside the object of investigation? One could however argue against this assertion that all Lamprecht

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<sup>135</sup> See Holborn (1952) p. 340.

<sup>136</sup> It is worth noting that not only in recent years scholars doubted the qualitative and deep-rooted difference between Ranke's method and the positivist movement. As early as 1897 Otto Hintze rejected a radical opposition between idealism and materialism in the philosophy of history. See Hintze (1964) p. 315 in Oestreich (1969) p. 360.

was stating is that there is a tendency which can be empirically observed and highlighted by the means of statistics.

Lamprecht claimed that history does not exhaust itself in a series of single events, which are only connected by so called 'universal ideas' incarnated in the minds of 'great men', but rather consists in the whole complexity of events that occur as expressions of the 'general will', the constitution and cultural peculiarity (e.g. unemployment, urbanisation, public health and education of a society). For Lamprecht political event history faces primarily the difficulty of showing that certain events are caused by other events outwith individualistic motives. The individual motives or the individual will, according to him, are only a by- or end-product of history. One could assert that these are presuppositions, which are also difficult to prove. It is worth adding that Karl Julius Beloch, Georg von Below and even Eduard Meyer acknowledged that the statistical method in cultural and economic history had a certain degree of usefulness. As we have seen, Beloch was perhaps the least sceptical of all of them.

With such a view on history and its 'proper' method, it is hard to see any compromise or conversion between Lamprecht's method and the traditional event- and individual-orientated historiography of historicism. One can say that it was primarily Georg von Below's *HZ* polemic '*Die Neue Historische Methode*' (1898) and his lengthy and less polemical, but still critical remarks in his '*Problem der Wirtschaftsgeschichte*' (1920), which destroyed any chance of a meaningful and argumentative dialogue between the two sides. Ironically, one of Below's main objections to Lamprecht's method was that he failed to acknowledge the possibility of co-existing methods and added that any search for new methods in 'science' (in the widest meaning of the word) should take place in the context of an open debate. It is interesting to see how the historicist position had weakened by the 1920s, although Lamprecht had died five years earlier. At the turn of the century neither Meyer nor Beloch, nor Sybel or Droysen would have agreed with Below's invitation to an open discussion.

Due to little sympathy and academic acknowledgement from his colleagues in historical studies, Lamprecht turned to sociology and psychology for support. Rather swiftly he declared the latter subject the proper basis of historical studies.<sup>137</sup> In the light of widespread conservatism and arrogance amongst the still predominant Ranke tradition, perhaps Lamprecht anticipated that his 'new methodology' would not find much serious

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<sup>137</sup> Lamprecht (1896/97) p. 27.

<sup>138</sup> Lamprecht (1896/97) p. 77.

and lasting support amongst his old colleagues.<sup>139</sup> The use of the statistical method, as Below had pointed out in criticism of Lamprecht, was already considered and incorporated in historical studies anyway but under the provision of the predominance of political history. The development of a new epistemological framework for historical studies was seen by Georg von Below not simply as unnecessary but also as potentially damaging to historicism, which had already been scratched by the fast progressing natural sciences. Below complained that Lamprecht tried to dissociate himself from the historical studies and intended to extinguish a methodological independence of the human sciences (*'Geisteswissenschaften'*) from the natural sciences (*'Naturwissenschaft'*) by degrading the former to be part of the latter. Below poised his readers to resist the threat of strict determination i.e. materialism in the historical sciences. According to Below, Lamprecht's materialism aimed at the destruction of the authority of the historic fact, the historic moment, the personality and its autonomous decision-making and apparently aimed at replacing them with pure fiction. Although Lamprecht distanced himself from the application of the empirical methodology of the natural sciences to historical studies, Below's assertion that the former did indeed follow such a route is apparent from the above elucidation of aspects of Lamprecht's method.<sup>140</sup> Below acknowledged that statistical calculations may be useful in economic history, but the subject and its methods can never aspire to reach priority over the traditional political historical analysis.

Below's ardour to demolish Lamprecht's 'new method' bore fruit eventually; it was exposed to mockery by historians by the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Lamprecht replied to his relentless critics by arguing that a method based on centralised individuality could at best be called art but not science, since it does not aim for generalisations, similarities and comparability. Lamprecht had to admit that natural sciences and social sciences are therefore not entirely different, but share the same belief in the trustworthiness of empirical knowledge. Directed against Below, Lamprecht asserted that 'specific detail should only be elucidated in order to induce the *fundamental*, the *general* and the *most abstract* in history, because the *general* and *most abstract* constitutes the truly theoretically and scientifically interesting and worth investigating in history'.<sup>141</sup> However, as pointed out

<sup>139</sup> Metz even goes so far to regard the rejection of Lamprecht's method amongst the neo-Rankeans as 'instinctively'. See Metz (1979) p. 475.

<sup>140</sup> Lamprecht (1896/97) p. 86. The establishment of generalisations and causal relations in history by experiment and observation and the neglect of the individual personality and the 'free will' are clearly signs of a historical method which follows the methodology of the natural sciences.

<sup>141</sup> See Lamprecht's polemic against his archenemy. 'The Historical Method of Herrn von Below' (1899) p. 6 ff.

above, Lamprecht's philosophy, as that of many psychologists, is driven by the ideal of the empirical method of observation and experiment as the only possible source of human knowledge. However, that 'all truths are of a social-psychological character', needs to be proven first before we can deduce any particulars from this premise.<sup>142</sup>

In order to find support and credibility Lamprecht propagated his 'new method' extremely valiantly. Since his theory stood and fell with a proof of a 'general social consciousness' and unity, to seek its success became for him also a political crusade, which he tried to establish academically by creating and chairing the '*Institut für Kultur- und Universalgeschichte*' at Leipzig in 1909. Politically he declared his full support for the nationalist cause by signing the 'Manifesto of the Ninety-Three German Intellectuals to the Civilised World' of 1914 and by visiting the German front line only a month before his death in March 1915.<sup>143</sup> It becomes clear through his political involvement that the utilisation of his historical methodology went hand in glove with Meyer's, Below's and Meinecke's efforts to serve the realisation of the nationalistic goals of German politics before, during and after World War I. This might, however, suggest that the ideological dimension of the *Methodenstreit*, which started off as 'political event history' vs. 'cultural history' ended entirely as a debate about the question of which factors or aspects of history were the most suitable means to achieve the nationalistic and imperialistic ends of German politics - 'crown' or German '*Volkstum*' (Aryanism).<sup>144</sup> This would however not be a fair judgement. Methodological and theoretical issues played an important part throughout the discussions and the polemic debates, but were often subsumed under the power of such completely overwhelming historical events, which could have easily confused even the wisest and most optimistic thinker.

Lamprecht's critique of the method and intellectual vanity of historicism did not hit the conservative historical scholarship unprepared. Already leading thinkers of the Historical School in *Nationalökonomie*, such as Gustav Schmoller (1838-1917) and Lujo Brentano (1844-1931) delivered thoughtful and detailed studies in the relatively new field

<sup>142</sup> Lamprecht(1895) p. 27.

<sup>143</sup> Amongst other subscribers were such famous names as Ernst Haeckl, Max Planck, Wilhelm Röntgen, Eduard Meyer, Friedrich Meinecke and Gustav von Schmoller who voiced their discomfort with 'the lies and calumnies with which our enemies are endeavouring to stain the honour of Germany in her hard struggle for existence - in a struggle that has been forced on her.' The manifesto ended on a high cultural note: 'Have faith in us! Believe, that we shall carry on this war to the end as a civilised nation, to whom the legacy of a Goethe, a Beethoven, and a Kant, is just as sacred as its own hearths and homes.' Source WWI-Document Archive. On Meinecke briefly Heuss (1957) pp. 329-330.

<sup>144</sup> Patriotic and Aryan elements can be found throughout Lamprecht's smaller writings but also in his *Deutsche Geschichte*. See Lamprecht (1915) and Lamprecht (1886/87) p. 80.

of economic and social history which, in contrast to Lamprecht, earned them some acknowledgement and status, even amongst the elitist and conservative historicist scholars. Both Brentano and Schmoller developed a conception of social policy ('*Sozialpolitik*') within a historical framework and by including economic and social phenomena, which later formed an essential part of the basis for Lamprecht's concept of mass-psychology.<sup>145</sup> On the other hand, Lamprecht's concept of 'cultural history' was conceived as the *anti-thesis* to the political event and individualistic driven method in historical studies.<sup>146</sup>

The Prussian School, and those who stood proudly in its tradition, maintained their claim to possess the only viable method of historical analysis and never accepted Lamprecht's method as an alternative to idealistic and nationalistic historiography. The documentation of the 'Historian Conference' in Innsbruck of 1897 indicates that the '*Methodenstreit*' at the turn of the century became a major debate about the method and '*Weltanschauung*' of historical studies and its historians. From the perspective of modernistic epistemological optimism which dominated the turn of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, one could perhaps see Lamprecht's position at best as having been caught out between two extreme viewpoints negotiating for its own good. At worst, one could deprive Lamprecht's method of any scientific credibility and degrade it as a humorous or sad spell in intellectual history. Eventually, both the historicists and the materialist historiography accused Lamprecht of dressing up an 'ideology in the gown of a science'.<sup>147</sup> For the established idealistic historiography, Lamprecht's statistical and mass-psychological generalisations endangered the supremacy of the 'great men' and moments in the history of nations. For the new materialist historians, like Franz Mehring and Karl Kautsky, Lamprecht's social psychology did not withstand the nationalistic and Aryan temptations of the bourgeoisie and left Lamprecht still with 'quite a long idealistic ponytail dangling down his back.'<sup>148</sup> Although Lamprecht insisted not being viewed as a mediator between the two sides, he was eventually drawn into the ideological debates in the run up to the World War I. Lamprecht of course knew only too well that he was not able to escape political categorisation. Lamprecht seemed to be sympathetic towards a progressive

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<sup>145</sup> Schmoller and Brentano, however, never distance themselves from the importance of the individual character of history. Especially Schmoller expressed his ideas in a very diplomatic fashion and dissociated himself from prioritising of the empirical method. See Oestreich (1969) p. 355. Some support for Lamprecht's methodological challenge came from the historians Kurt Breysing and Otto Hintze. See Kocka (1981) p. 67 ff. For a sketch of Lujo Brentano's position within the *Nationalökonomie* see Heuss (1957) pp. 270-276.

<sup>146</sup> See Metz (1979).

<sup>147</sup> Iggers (1984) p. 29 f.

<sup>148</sup> See Mehring in Oestreich (1969) p.351 n122.

intellectual liberalism, similar to that of his colleague and friend, Karl Bücher, which had only just started to gain support amongst younger circles of German intellectuals. Lamprecht's philosophy allowed reinterpretation of the social phenomena of his times under mass-psychological and cultural parameters, without being entirely associated and dismissed as a follower of Marxism.

Lamprecht saw his 'new method' as an opportunity to combine materialism and idealism with one another under the modernist ideal to achieve scientific, economic and social progress. This notion of progress itself is linked to the modernistic understanding of history, which benefited the emergence of political economy, sociology and psychology and found its most loyal supporters in these subjects.<sup>149</sup> Symptomatic for these sciences was the use of 'ideal-types' in order to formulate valid historical concepts. The ideal-type formed also an essential part of Max Weber's attempt to conceptualise economic history. we shall return to this point in Part III. Lamprecht explained the use of these types in his programmatic essay 'What is Cultural History?'<sup>150</sup> Not discussed, however, was the question of on what grounds those 'ideal-typical' concepts emerge? The comparative method of historical investigation may have the advantage of enquiring 'how things became' rather than 'how things really were', but the ideal-typical concepts have to be analysed in a historical fashion too. Otherwise, Lamprecht would also be guilty of modernising history, not by analogy but by the use of modern concepts.

As Georg G. Iggers has pointed out correctly, Lamprecht's challenge did not lead to a radical reorientation of historical studies. Yet the *Lamprechtstreit* is extremely important for the development of historical studies in Germany and in the Western World.<sup>151</sup> Unfortunately, this debate on historiographical method faced the same fate as the Bücher-Meyer Controversy; it did not reach a satisfactory solution or even a conclusion, but rather faded out and was eventually discontinued. Beyond this perhaps unfortunate development, the *Methodenstreit* offers a viable explanation as to why Bücher's comparative method of history, which carries elements of ideal-typical concept formation and a notion of historical progress that was essential to his theory of economic history, faced such harsh opposition from Meyer and Beloch not only in its historiographical detail but also in its methodology and ideological link to Lamprecht.<sup>152</sup>

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<sup>149</sup> See Iggers (1973) on progress in history.

<sup>150</sup> Lamprecht(1896/97) p. 82.

<sup>151</sup> Iggers (1984) p. 31.

<sup>152</sup> Bücher's use of the ideal types was however more influenced by Rodbertus than by Lamprecht, which springs already from the chronology of publications and Bücher's references to Rodbertus. See Part I.1.ii.

A short spell of popularity of Lamprecht's ideas at the beginning of the 1930s found its end with the take-over of National Socialism in 1933, which put Germany's historians again under heavy political duty.<sup>153</sup> In some way, it is surprising that Lamprecht's 'Aryanism' and notion of 'collective consciousness' rose to a higher degree of popularity under Hitler. Although Lamprecht's emphasis on the material and psychological forces in history did not stand directly against the ideology of National Socialism, it was surely against the presupposed supremacy and dominance of the historic individual, the *Führer*.

Besides the above mentioned ideological reasons, Faulenbach has argued that the 'German historiography - unlike the American - had already reached its full shape at the beginning of the high-capitalistic age and it was therefore probably easier for the non-German historiography to explore new ways'.<sup>154</sup> We see that this argument is rather weak, but what Faulenbach is probably trying to say is that a fully developed and established theory is less likely to adopt changes and accept methodological challenges.

It is also worth considering the unsatisfactory outcome of the *Lamprechtstreit* and its influence on other subjects in social and economic history. Similar disputes in America and France (around Turner and Lacombe) strengthened the position of social and economic history in both countries, but a reorientation of the German historiographical method did not happen until after Second World War.<sup>155</sup> Lamprecht's lack of accomplishment amongst the German historiography is surprising when compared to his success in France and the Anglo-Saxon world. Here, perhaps due to the advancement of positivism and its influence on political economy and sociology, Lamprecht's 'new method' found considerable support. For example, Teggart's and Marvin's 'cultural morphology' is strongly influenced by Lamprecht.<sup>156</sup> Support came also from parts of the Vienna Circle who were forced to flee to the US.<sup>157</sup>

All in all the *Lamprechtstreit*, regardless of all its public interest and intensity, has not enabled the Bücher-Meyer Controversy to reach a solution, or come to an acceptable compromise; the rift between the scholars became even greater due to this conflict.

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<sup>153</sup> More sympathetic towards Lamprecht's '*Kulturgeschichte*' were sociologists, economists and ancient historians. The influence, which Lamprecht's ideal-typical and universal method had on other scholars who are more directly connected to the Bücher-Meyer Controversy shall be elucidated in the chapters part III on Max Weber and Johannes Hasebroek.

<sup>154</sup> Faulenbach (1980) p. 90.

<sup>155</sup> See Schulze (1974) p. 48 f.

<sup>156</sup> See Metz (1979) p. 475.

<sup>157</sup> On Lamprecht's influence on Karl Popper, for example, see Agassi (1963).

However, the philosophical and methodological differences in both stances became more obvious due to the apparent ideological and methodological disagreements.

## 4. Windelband and Rickert

### *i. The Rediscovery of Kant*

It has been argued that at the end of last century for a German intellectual, idealist philosophy was some kind of second nature; almost innate and pervasive in all aspects of thought and culture. Hughes argued that 'Kant...remained the dominant formative influence on the German mind' until the 1950s. Hegel too 'had built his doctrine from an idealist premise that the ultimate reality of the universe lay in 'spirit' or 'idea' rather than in mere data or sense perception.'<sup>158</sup> Most Hegelians would interpret '*Geist*' as the social form most adequate to people's needs. A more popular view towards the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century understood the appearance of 'spirit' (*Geist*) as a realisation of practical reasoning on the grounds of German patriotism, which formed a unity of purpose into one unifying world historical context. This interpretation brought Ranke and Hegel closer together regarding the political dimension of their historiography. With the 'rediscovery' of Kant, their idealistic philosophy formed at least an important vehicle for the continuation of the idealist and historicist traditions. Whilst historicism still exercised a strong influence onto the *Geisteswissenschaften*, it also was a pervasive attitude found amongst the aristocracy and the upper bourgeoisie. In turn the Anglo-French tradition relied much more on the validity of empirical procedures and the supremacy of the sense perceptions as the only credible sources of knowledge, a method which is also often used as a simple line of defence for the system of Western democracy, utilitarianism and the conception of universal (empirical) science in methodology and epistemology.<sup>159</sup> However, as we have seen above, it is not helpful for a detailed understanding of the Bücher-Meyer Controversy to blame the bitterness of this dispute on generalisations such as the 'German soul' vs 'Anglo-Saxon positivism.' Such categorisations still feature amongst academics and the populist media nowadays, resulting in a deep misunderstanding and fostering intellectual snobbery and ignorance on both sides.

However, it would be equally wrong not to point out the considerable differences between the influence of what is often referred to as German idealism, and also the

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<sup>158</sup> Hughes (1959) p. 183.

<sup>159</sup> Demandt (1998) p. 88.

application of the empirical method in sociology and political economy in Britain, America and France. As stated earlier, the idealisation of scientific and technological progress considerably affected the supremacy of the historical scholarship over the natural sciences negatively. We also noted Germany's quest to address and resolve the 'national' and the 'social question' and the patriotic involvement of its historians. Although it is not quite clear why after the era of German Idealism, which is perhaps marked with Hegel's death in 1831, the interest in philosophy at Germany's universities was dramatically in decline, it is widely accepted that for more than fifty years (until the 1880s) historians (mainly from Prussia) and no longer philosophers, enjoyed academically and politically elevated status. It was not until the late 19th century that a renewed interest emerged in Kant's epistemology and moral theory, which helped philosophy as an academic discipline back into popularity.<sup>160</sup> Wilhelm Windelband (1844-1915) and his pupil Heinrich Rickert (1863-1936) were primarily responsible for this revival.

It is certainly true that very few historians during their period of relative academic supremacy devoted detailed studies into their own methodology and the philosophy of history in general.<sup>161</sup> Part of the swift and arrogant rejection of Lamprecht's and Bücher's position was indeed a certain philosophical ignorance or unwillingness to engage critically with elements of opposing philosophical traditions.

Windelband and Rickert though, the leading figures of the 'Southwest German School' in philosophy ('*Südwestdeutsche Schule*'), together with Hermann Cohen (1842-1918), Paul Natorp (1854-1924) and Ernst Cassirer (1874-1945) of the 'Marburg School', attempted to establish a solid philosophical defence line in order to develop Kant's idealistic paradigm of an epistemological difference between the human sciences and the natural sciences.<sup>162</sup> By doing so they formed the neo-Kantian movement, which was able to resist the generalisations of positivism and to further Kant's search for *a priori* transcendental conditions, the epistemological categories of morality, art and history.

Every scientific concept formation attempts to make generalisations for a particular end or purpose. The historic concept formation must therefore be different from the concepts and method employed in the natural sciences, since both subjects follow a

<sup>160</sup> The renewed interest into Kant's philosophy was supported by the publication of the '*Kant Studien*' in 1896, which is now a standard journal for almost every university library. On the history and legacy of the '*Kant-Studien*' see Funke (1996).

<sup>161</sup> Finley (1984) p. 265.

<sup>162</sup> The neo-Kantian 'movement' is by no means a homogenous philosophical school. Lask, Bauch, Cohn, Zocher and Hönigswald are also part of this movement. The interpretation and elaboration of Kant's ideas reaches from Platonism (Lask) over Aryanism (Cohn) to psychoanalytical interpretations (Hönigswald).

different purpose. One might assert that biology, for example, also inquires into the world of human affairs since it also investigates human life. However, biology investigates only the material or natural preconditions of life, but not the diverse world of human actions. For Paul Natorp the existence of the human will is signalled via the existence of such different scientific ends (*'Zwecke'*).<sup>163</sup> It is not our purpose to outline the different stances and the diversity of the neo-Kantian movement. It is primarily relevant to highlight the fact that Windelband and Rickert maintained and argumentatively supported the historicist claim that scientific historical investigation stems from a different 'theoretical interest' than the value free and empirically generalising method of the natural sciences or utilitarian and emotivist theories of human action.<sup>164</sup>

Rickert tried to show in his work 'Cultural Science and Natural Science'<sup>165</sup> of 1899 and in his 'Limits of the Concept Formation in the Natural Sciences' in 1902<sup>166</sup> that on the grounds of Kant's transcendental categories, the individual should remain the object of historical inquiry and not the so called underlying general and material processes.<sup>167</sup> Rickert accused Lamprecht of idealising 'the stomach instead of the human mind' as the dominant motive of action.<sup>168</sup> Rickert's and Windelband's stance, which is very similar to Below's, maintained that positivistic and naturalistic tendencies in historical studies remove the individual from the stage of history and reduce the subject merely to an object of speculation and naturalistic determinism. Again such critical comments reflect the general situation in academia and amongst the educated public. The natural sciences and their empirical method received increased interest at the turn of the century and were believed to present the 'true form of science.'<sup>169</sup> This optimistic view that scientific invention equals progress in all other spheres of human life from art to morality, is perhaps most potent in respect of the purpose of the World Exhibitions. Modernity put its faith into the healing forces of world trade, commerce and technology and continued to pursue the enlightenment dream of governing the forces of nature and universe with technology. The main intellectual difference between the progressive spirit embodied in the Paris exhibition of 1900 and the enlightenment ideals of Hegel, for example, was primarily a spiritual one.

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<sup>163</sup> See Natorp (1913) p. 22.

<sup>164</sup> See Oakes (1989).

<sup>165</sup> See Rickert (1899).

<sup>166</sup> See Rickert (1902).

<sup>167</sup> Rickert (1981) p.41-58.

<sup>168</sup> Rickert (1899) p. 60 f. See also Rickert (1902) 'The problem of the historical concept formation consists thus, whether a scientific procession and simplification of the ostensive reality is possible without losing its individuality, as it happens with the concepts of the natural sciences.

<sup>169</sup> Oestreich (1969) p. 325.

Hence, it must have been a great relief to the supporters of the supremacy of historicism that Rickert and Windelband formulated a philosophical defence of its methodology.<sup>170</sup> Both reformulated the methodology of the historicist tradition, but also distanced themselves critically from Ranke and the Prussian School. History as an expression of divine ideas, as in Ranke, or history as an extension of guiding political ideas, as expressed in the German-Prussian nation state, in Droysen, Treitschke and Sybel, appeared to Rickert and Windelband as rather irrational doctrines. Both were in particular critical of the selection of what was historically 'important' and 'unique', which placed the historian with his particular *Weltanschauung* at the centre of historical evaluation. Subjectivity and individuality were centrally important to Rickert and Windelband, which constituted an important move away from Ranke's attempt to grasp 'how it really was'. However, when Hughes argues that the irrational or subjective values of the historian suddenly played a part in the considerations of the historian, then we have to remember that the historicist movement away from Ranke was rather gradual and not swift.<sup>171</sup> In addition one should not be mistaken about the fact that historians prior to Windelband and Rickert, in particular Ranke, did not completely deny the involvement of the historian's value system in the interpretation of the historical event. Amongst all historicists Droysen dissociated himself most clearly from any attempt to gain an 'objective picture' of the historical event and stressed instead that historical '*Verstehen*' (reflective understanding) must include awareness of the problem of the individual judgement or the value system of the historian, which, however, did not mean an independence from the political questions of his time.<sup>172</sup> One cannot deny though that Ranke's idealism was founded on the belief that the divine or leading political ideas are capable of guiding the historian to an adequate understanding of the material. The proof of the existence and scope of such ideas remains, however, the main problem for Ranke.

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<sup>170</sup> See Georg von Below's remark in Steinberg (1925) p. 15. 'By reading Rickert's writing I had a feeling of happiness to be liberated from the threat of prejudices, which I felt as wrong though anyway, but I was unable to deduce their wrongs to the last instance. In that sense I experienced Rickert's "limits" with his stance against positivism and naturalism with joy [and] poetry of life.'

<sup>171</sup> Hughes (1959) p. 180.

<sup>172</sup> Quite the opposite was the case. Droysen and also Sybel emphasised the subjective patriotic ethos of the historian. See also Hitler's appreciation for Droysen's *Historik* in Demandt (1998) p. 96 n55, n58.

## ii. Windelband's 'Ideography' and 'Nomothetik'

In his Principal Inaugural Speech of 1894 in Strasbourg, Windelband pointed out that his contemporaries still seemed to distinguish between the 'theoretical interest' philosophy and mathematics as the '...“rational”...' sciences, on the one hand and the 'empirical sciences' (*Erfahrungswissenschaften*), on the other.<sup>173</sup> According to Windelband mathematics and philosophy do not deal with one particular or a mass of sense perceptions and their categorisation under general empirical laws. This difference in the theoretical interest led to the commonly used distinction between human sciences (*Gesiteswissenschaften*) and natural sciences (*Naturwissenschaft*), which was firmly emphasised by Descartes, Spinoza, Schelling and Hegel. 'As far as I can sense the atmosphere within current philosophy and judge the aftermath of the epistemological critique it is not anymore self-evident that the difference between the empirical sciences and the 'rational' sciences are so fundamental as to justify such a differentiation.'<sup>174</sup> Nevertheless, an important difference remains. The so-called natural sciences aim for the discovery of general laws, which allow us to quantify and explain repeatable phenomena. Windelband called them 'law-sciences'. With regard to their methodology the 'law sciences' are called '*nomothetic*'. Historical studies and the so-called human sciences, on the other hand, are predominantly aim to find an adequate description of the particular phenomenon or event. Windelband calls them therefore 'event sciences' or '*ideographic*' sciences with difference between the two methods lying in their objects of inquiry.<sup>175</sup> The method used in psychology does not simply hold a middle position between the two, but is according to Windelband concerned with the epistemological object of the *ideographic* sciences, but employs for its descriptions the *nomothetic* methodology. '*Ideographie*' makes particular predications over singular or particular events or objects. '*Nomothetik*' formulates common predications over  $x$  amount of objects or events.<sup>176</sup> The character of the object of inquiry and the interest of the researcher lead then to two different methods of inquiry.

Linguistics is used as an example by Windelband to demonstrate that even the human sciences formulate or aim at the discovery of general laws or principles - in this

<sup>173</sup> See Windelband (1904) p. 4 f.

<sup>174</sup> Windelband (1904) p. 5.

<sup>175</sup> Windelband (1904) p. 6.

<sup>176</sup> See Demandt (1998) p. 94.

example, grammatical structures and rules. In turn, for example, biology may analyse the nature of a specific type of animal as a unique phenomenon in its particular time and place. It seems then that the distinction between what is the ‘law-like ever continuous’ (*‘das gesetzmäßig Immergleichen’*), and what is in its character formation unique (*‘das gestalthaft Einmaligen’*) depends on the judgement of the observer. The form of the scientific inquiry is then not so much influenced by the object of investigation itself, but by the purpose or interest of the explanation, which is relative to what the scientist puts on his agenda.<sup>177</sup> That is to say, every object or event can be described scientifically in two separate ways. Biology as the ‘science of the organic nature’ is of a ‘nomothetic character’ when it focuses on biological recurrences.<sup>178</sup> In its systematic character it aims at the discovery of the existence of causal connections between biological phenomena. For example, if the winter season starts to set in, squirrels tend to collect nuts and other food to survive the cold period to come. By explaining the phenomenon with a set of instincts or reflexes, which all mammals have in common to some degree, we are using the ‘*nomothetik*’ method. However, if the scientist views the entire phenomenon or process of development of the squirrel as something unique to this species only, the scientist would follow ‘*ideographic*’ method. ‘Already Kant, as he constructed the concept of the modern theory of evolution, ahead of everyone else, called the person who would follow this “adventure of reason”, the future “archaeologist of nature”...’<sup>179</sup> It seems that for Windelband the distinction between history and philosophy, on the one hand, and physics and biology, on the other hand, is entirely dependent on the attitude of the scientist to the object. If we take Kant’s quote seriously and add Windelband’s division of all human scientific inquiry into *nomothetic* and *ideographic* knowledge, then the paradigm of German idealism does not appear to be as solid as the Prussian School and Meyer deemed it to be. One could lapse into the cynical view that all the ‘fuss’ about the ontological strict distinction between ‘*Geisteswissenschaften*’ and ‘*Naturwissenschaften*’ and even more the superiority of the former over the latter in its shape of political event history, was created in order to support and advance Prussian/German political agenda. Yet, this would be a premature conclusion, which would not strictly follow from what we have outlined so far. Windelband only drew an epistemological distinction between the *Geistes-* and *Naturwissenschaften*, which is dependent on the research interests of the scientists and his

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<sup>177</sup> Windelband (1904) p. 7.

<sup>178</sup> See Windelband (1904) p. 7.

<sup>179</sup> Windelband (1904) p. 7.

definition of the object of enquiry. Human kind and nature or *Geist* and *Natur* do not exist as two separate ontological qualities.

Windelband's claim that both methods or modes of investigation (*Ideographie* and *Nomothetik*) have to develop scientific ways of classifying observations and experiences is very plausible; he calls this 'scientific critique'<sup>180</sup>, with which the trained historian is capable of making an educated decision as to whether or not a certain fragment stems indeed from Aristotle's hand, or how an astronomer has to be able to learn to distinguish between stars and planets. The microbiologist has to learn his art of how to search for a suitable object of inquiry when looking through his test results, say to find and isolate a cancer cell. Those scientific skills are learned and influenced by the methods and stimuli of the previous scholarship, which a young scientist has to learn. Logic has its office in scientific critique, but as Windelband admits, has not had the same influence over the *ideographic* sciences as it had over the *nomothetic* method or mode of investigation. Windelband refers here to the success in such fields as precision tools, experimental procedures and the probability theory. The deficiencies in philosophy and history are excused in that it would 'lie in the nature of things, as history has confirmed, that philosophical and natural scientific [*naturwissenschaftlich*] vocations and achievements concur much more frequent than the philosophical and historical [vocations].'<sup>181</sup> The validity of this generalisation is rather dubious. It also seems that if indeed the difference between history and biology, for example, only lies with the evaluation and use of the facts ('*Tatsachen*'), then this could leave the scientists with only a subjective (or inter subjective) basis of scientific critique. It may be true, as Windelband maintains, that the natural scientist is only interested in a particular object or sample as it represents a certain type or concept with which we comprehend it under a general law or principle. However, that the historian has the task to 'revive a particular event of the past in its own peculiar individuality and to recall it into our ideal present, is not far off Ranke's programmatic invocation 'how it really was'. Abstraction may be the virtue or rigor of the biologist, but the historian should give the most lively illustration possible of what happened in the past. Windelband concludes that this constitutes a relationship and explain the close proximity between aesthetics, history and poetry.<sup>182</sup>

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<sup>180</sup> Windelband (1904) p. 8.

<sup>181</sup> Windelband (1904) p. 8.

<sup>182</sup> See Windelband (1904) p. 9.

However, no matter how appealing Windelband tries to make his distinction, it does not solve the problem of the definition of historical critique or critique of sources. That an even 'educated', 'normal' or 'common sense consciousness' (*'Normalbewußsein'*) can 'mislead' us, proceeds from the fact that our norms or what we call 'rational or moral common sense' is educated and influenced by a specific and political value system, which constitutes conditions of *ideographic* specialisation and even *nomothetic* generalisations in respect of the theoretical purpose of the investigation. On what grounds, we may ask, should the historian regard an event as important? By what means should he illustrate this importance? This takes us again very close to the central problem of the Bücher-Meyer Controversy.

Nevertheless, Windelband's *ideographic* versus *nomothetic* distinction highlights an interesting crux. According to Windelband, Bücher and Meyer must both be using '*Ideographie*' and '*Nomothetik*', only the proportion of their use in the scientific propositions is different. To judge the 'economy' of ancient Athens during the classical period compared to modern times as 'primitive' or 'modern' means to treat it as a phenomenon or peculiarity and is therefore employing the '*ideographic*' mode. Bücher's method is surely '*nomothetic*' in the sense that he uses the ancient economy as a sample to elucidate his theory of economic stages - the law-like course of economic development. Meyer, on the other hand, follows the '*ideographic*' mode of investigation by concentrating on the importance of the event and the importance of the personality in ancient history and its economy.<sup>183</sup> At the same time though Meyer makes claims about the circular development of civilisations, beginning with its rise and development, achieving its cultural climax and material prosperity and ending up in its decline. Here he must admit to Windelband that he also makes a law-like generalisation and hence shows a nomothetic cognitive interest in history. According to Windelband, the methods of gathering human knowledge [*'Ideographie*' and '*Nomographik*'] are not of the same kind, but influence one another nevertheless. 'Both together cause and explain the event, but neither is the result of the former; their connection is not found amongst them.'<sup>184</sup> To judge the 'economy' of ancient Athens during the Classical period as compared to modern times as 'primitive' or 'modern' is nomothetic as long as we are aiming to make a generalisation of the specific. According to Windelband, the events of the past can never be truly reconstructed or repeated. To grasp what changes or develops, we need to have a fixed viewpoint for our

<sup>183</sup> e.g. Meyer's 'Hanibal' in Meyer (1910).

<sup>184</sup> Windelband (1904) p. 13.

observation. In order to highlight what remains unchanged we need to contrast it with what has developed in order to be able to historically analyse human rationality against the law-like nature of nature, which remains unchanged.<sup>185</sup>

Later Windelband's classification became important for Max Weber, who incorporated and attempted to supersede the epistemological difference between the two methods by constructing the '*Idealtypos*' in order to add a possible solution to the problem of interpretation and method, which both Bücher and Meyer were unable to solve by themselves. However, Windelband's weakly defined notion of 'rational common sense' does not solve the problem of the appropriate proportion of cognitive interest in the *nomothetic* and *ideographic* elements. All Windelband was able to show was that history exists in the form of selected facts and values by the historian. If this were true, history would ultimately remain subjective or culturally relative. Hence, the neo-Kantian attempt to safeguard the objective character of history would have failed. However, Windelband argued that the process of selection of those events, values and 'memories' is not an arbitrary process. Windelband tried to guarantee that is not culturally relative. The historian is therefore not guided solely by his own subjective values, desires and wishes, but guided by the self-manifestation of important historic processes which he grasped as evidently historically relevant and important. In close relation to the Prussian School, Windelband argued that what is really historical are those events which had an impact on history, those personalities which played an important part in history's course, and those nations which stood out and left a mark on the 'big stage of world history', not just those who come and go.<sup>186</sup> Such a statement does not lead us any further. The 'danger of subjectivity' still persists, since it does not automatically answer a possible disagreement about what we may call the 'big stage' and what leaving a mark means. In order to solve the problem, Windelband introduces some kind of *general task of human history*, something mankind should as it were 'live up to', which is so to say in mankind's nature. He claims, that 'history is therefore the process with which the task of humanity, perhaps in a slowly growing amount is fulfilled.' This task is to develop a '*vernünftigen Gesamtsinn*' ('collective common sense').<sup>187</sup> Here we see indeed how close together Windelband and Lamprecht came. Windelband unlike his pupil Heinrich Rickert, did not

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<sup>185</sup> See Demandt (1998) 94 f.

<sup>186</sup> Windelband (1916) p. 39 f.

<sup>187</sup> Windelband (1916) p. 57.

create a *metaphysics of values*, as Viikari has maintained.<sup>188</sup> Viikari would have to justify the view that the development of such a '*vernünftigen Gemeinsinn*' is not a certain value but a matter of fact. Furthermore, Windelband assumes that mankind aspires to this task to create a '*vernünftigen Gemeinsinn*', that human history is something which is ongoing. One wonders why, according to Windelband, is the biological development of mankind finalised and only a spiritual furthering is possible? Windelband was contradicting the scientific evidence of his time, but seemed to suggest here that real becoming or self-realisation in history is solely a spiritual and not a physical or biological task. That is to say, history is for him something solely applicable to the spirit ('*Geist*') of mankind and not to nature. The roots of Windelband's philosophy in German idealism are now clearly visible.

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<sup>188</sup> Viikari (1977) p. 437.

### iii. Rickert and the Problem of Historical Concept Formation

Despite many similarities between Heinrich Rickert and his friend and teacher, Wilhelm Windelband, both influenced the German historical scholarship in their own distinctive way. Their work is particularly relevant for Max Weber's interpretation of the economy and the society of antiquity described in ideal-types. Whilst the discussions about the academic and political importance of ancient history and the debate over the scientific method in historical studies were both still ongoing,<sup>189</sup> the younger Rickert did not, as Demandt formulated recently, 'overlook the point of the contact between the ideographic and nomothetic generalisation',<sup>190</sup> but rather extended Windelband's thesis in order to reinstate history as a proper science.<sup>191</sup> Demandt's concerns are directed towards the remaining (above) problem regarding the appropriate viewpoint of the historian. If we leave method and the selection of the material to the disposal of the historian, might then one read into an event whatever one wishes? Windelband did however not hold a relativistic position, but perhaps invited such incorrect interpretation.

Rickert addressed the problem of subjectivity in historical interpretation more directly than Windelband. According to the former, history does not exhaust itself in relativism and despair due to the difficulties with a formal definition of Windelband's concept of 'normative consciousness', which somehow intuitively and through industrious acquisition of skills guides the historian to know what to look for when he studies the sources. For Rickert it is not so much the classification or the cognitive interest which lies at the heart of the old distinction between the human and the natural sciences, but more the problem of the scientific concept formation in the '*Geistes-*' and '*Naturwissenschaften*'. This concept formation is however only possible if the terminology is adequate and valid. In order to achieve this, Rickert attempted to develop Windelband's epistemological distinction between the world of human affairs and the world of nature by protecting it against the almost inevitable relativistic interpretation, which is tied up with the historicity or temporality of the values of the judging historian.

Rickert suggests that certain values are transcendental and form moral imperatives for both the historian and the natural scientist. The universal validity and

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<sup>189</sup> A good overview about the course of the discussion from the perspective of the idealistic historiography is presented by Schieder (1959) esp. pp. 37-63.

<sup>190</sup> Demandt (1998) p. 94.

<sup>191</sup> Rickert (1902) p. 190.

objectivity of the laws of nature presuppose that certain judgements are generally valid (*'geltend'*). This applies to history as well, since we can equally feasibly assume the existence of absolute values in history, which create a different stance or disagreement about a certain event - some scientists may follow their particular professional ethos with more commitment and discipline than others, for example. This kind of 'metaphysics of values' i.e. their objective existence was not the only step towards a 'cultural-scientific world view' (*'kulturwissenschaftliche Weltanschauung'*) put forward by Rickert.<sup>192</sup> Rickert's essential building block was the claim that neither the natural sciences nor the historical or cultural sciences are aimed at making true statements about the world, but are rather aimed at the validity of presuppositions in respect of a particular scientific interest. The difference between the two types of sciences (the *'Geistes-'* and *'Naturwissenschaften'*) does not lie in the contradiction between body and mind, between the material and the spiritual world, but in a distinctly different way of forming scientific historical concepts. Rickert argued that the concept formation of the natural sciences, which is very much based on the qualifying method of a physical or mathematical explanation of nature, always has some relevance for the world of human affairs, especially with regard to past or future usefulness of the scientific description.

As we pointed out with respect to Windelband, the natural sciences aimed at forming concepts about the general. That is to say, the only aspects of an object which are important are those which are part of the specific qualification of what makes it part or a suitable sample of a species. History, on the other hand, deals with the history of cultures and only with natural phenomena in so far they had an observable influence on the course of cultures or the occurrence of historical events. Although Rickert acknowledges that the natural sciences are capable of forming conclusions about social and cultural nature or the destiny of our existence, 'the empirical reality can also be expressed under a different point of view, apart from the point that it is nature. 'It [reality] becomes nature when we consider it with respect for the general; it [reality] becomes history when we consider it with respect of the particular'<sup>193</sup> The natural sciences are in the quest for the general, a kind of general law or rule, under which they can summarise or theorise and also predict our perceptions of reality. On the other hand, history searches for reality in the particular. The particular must then be the object of a kind of representation of history.

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<sup>192</sup> Rickert (1899) p. 67.

<sup>193</sup> Rickert (1902) 254.

For Rickert, the place of history is the world of human affairs, our interaction and political involvement. That is of course not to say that no kind of life science has any part in the world of human affairs or that history does not play a part in the exploration of nature. Rickert rather rejects the aspect of August Conte's claim that human civilisation follows certain laws of development, which are derived from nature and its descriptive empirical laws (evolution).<sup>194</sup> We see that it is not a strict separation of the world of human affairs and the world of nature, which forces a difference between the two types of sciences, but the distinction between the two scientific realms lies the objects of inquiry that each science pursues. This clearly separates Rickert's approach from the radical differentiation of the natural world from the historical world as advocated by the Neapolitan visionary, Giambattista Vico (1668-1744) in the seventeenth century and clearly pursued in the neo-Humanism of Herder and Goethe in the late eighteenth century.<sup>195</sup> Rickert argued that these two types of sciences differed only in the methods to be employed in research.

By operating within the Kantian framework, Rickert made no effort to separate the two sciences logically in terms of their object, but only methodologically. The question Rickert faced was how historical knowledge is possible when we don't seek empirically verifiable generalisations. The key to solving this problem lies in the difference in the scientific concept formation. We can only talk intelligently about objects and processes by bringing them under 'valid concepts' (*'geltende Begriffe'*), argued Rickert. Whenever we undertake to describe a historical event or a physical process we need to agree on the valid concepts which we use for the description. The object itself can never be a concept. Reality is the precondition of concept formation. Each concept is therefore only an abstraction of an aspect of reality. Reality is therefore always ontologically richer than its concepts, which are merely abstractions and bear only a logical connection to reality. Valid concept formation constitutes a precondition for 'true' knowledge.<sup>196</sup>

History, on the other hand, deals with the problem of individual concept formation. Thus, Rickert concludes, in the historical sciences it is not individuality in itself which has epistemic value (*Wert*), but whether we are able to arrive at valid conclusions and form valid concepts. However, if we regard individuality solely as reality

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<sup>194</sup> Rickert (1902) 206.

<sup>195</sup> See Berlin (1976).

<sup>196</sup> See Lask (1914). Lask was one of Rickert's pupils and pointed out first the logical contradiction between

we cannot comprehend it in its entirety, but only through conceptualisation. There is no doubt, because of the distance between object and the observer, that we can never say with complete certainty that a particular event took place in a particular course, but we can make true statements about the valid use of historical concepts. This leaves a gap not between different objects of investigation but between the irrational character of reality and the attempted rationality of concept formation. Reality can never be deduced from a concept.

The epistemological dualism between concept and reality emerged first in the philosophy of the German idealist, Johann Gottlieb Fichte (1762-1816), as the so called *biatus irrationalis*, which was taken up by Rickert's pupil, Emil Lask (1875-1915).<sup>197</sup> The laws of physics are then only rational conclusions from a theory of concepts but never of reality itself. Since events do not follow a strict logical course and can occur by accident, and since history, according to Rickert, carries a more or less significant element of free will, history and its personalities can never be brought under general rules. But how is historical knowledge possible if such a *biatus irrationalis*, the dualism between concept and reality, exists? One solution would be to attempt to close the gap and resolve the epistemological conflict between concept and reality as Hegel and Herder tried to do. This influential neo-Humanist enlightenment conception of history, in which the historical flux and diversity are subordinated to universal standards aims to view each age "in its own terms" and to presuppose that history constitutes an organic and dialectical process which connects the ages with one another.<sup>198</sup> Rickert used the *biatus irrationalis* as one of his presuppositions in order to demonstrate how historical knowledge is possible despite this obstacle.

Rickert introduces five steps in the chain of reasoning in order to show the possibility of historical knowledge. They are grounded in a) the phenomenology of reality, b) the critique of epistemological realism, c) an epistemological theory of cognitive interest and concepts, d) a theory of concept formation in the natural sciences and e) the demarcation criterion between natural sciences and historical studies.<sup>199</sup> It is not necessary to outline Rickert's lengthy and quite sophisticated theory in detail in order to show to what degree it supported aspects of the historicist position and in what way it

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concept and reality.

<sup>197</sup> Oakes in Rickert (1986) p. xvi.

<sup>198</sup> Hegel's philosophy of history had no significant influence on the methodological writings of Meyer, Bücher and Weber. Some authors even argue that Hegel's philosophy was not rediscovered until Lucas, Adorno and Horkheimer. See Wilkins (1974).

became influential on the philosophy of history of Max Weber. Regarding the former criterion, Rickert does not insist on the historicist ontological distinction between nature and history and their sciences. His criterion is rather based on a so called 'axiological' separation of the natural and the historical sciences in the sense that it expresses an irreducible difference in their theoretical values, which then require a different conceptualisation of reality.<sup>200</sup> This difference in the concept formation follows the different interests of the scientist. The natural scientist is more engaged in the establishment of valid abstract generalisations, which increasingly dispense with the individual or the particular sample. Its importance is subsumed under the general law or physical principle. The historical sciences, on the other hand, aim to contemplate the individual in its historic importance or value which it has as a unique object or event for us. Viewed in such a fashion, historical studies deal with the conceptualisation of reality, the comprehension of causes of events, the historical accident and the free will in human agency and are therefore also concerned with the irrationality of the reality of human life. Rickert makes the methodological difference between the two sciences clear by using Georg Simmel's distinction between 'science of concept relations' (*Begriffswissenschaft*) and science of reality (*Wirklichkeitswissenschaft*).<sup>201</sup> Any science if it has the pretension to be taken seriously will create concepts, but the difference between the natural sciences and the historical studies seems to lie in the vicinity of reality. We must conclude then that the more abstract and logical the science of physics is, for example, the more sophisticated is this academic subject. The more empathic, but nevertheless logical, historical studies are, the deeper is the understanding of the particular historical phenomenon or event. That the historian, like the physicist, is ever able to comprehend and reconstruct an event in all its entirety stems from the *biatus irrationalis*. This was also acknowledged by Meyer, who perhaps at a less sophisticated level maintained that the historian should create valid analogies, but remained unclear as to what constitutes 'valid'.<sup>202</sup>

If logic should prevail in historical studies too, one needs to ask on what basis should the historian form and employ concepts that are rational and are capable of an adequate description of an irrational world. That irrational world is constituted by the peculiar actions of the individual agent. Following Windelband, Rickert saw personality

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<sup>199</sup> See Oakes in Rickert (1986) p. xvii ff.

<sup>200</sup> See Oakes in Rickert (1986) p. xxii f.

<sup>201</sup> See Simmel (1977) p. See also the introduction by Oakes to Simmel (1977)

or individuality as the focus of all historical knowledge. Every human being is unique and by being so, it is also clear that all human beings are all potentially historic personalities. Nevertheless, the historian does not judge all human beings as having had the same actual historical status or importance. If one would do so, individuality would be subsumed under an idea of human history, as the history of the masses whereby every personality would be reduced to a single grain of sand in a pile. History as an academic discipline is concerned with the importance of individual decision making. The question remains though, what are the exact criteria by which we judge an individual as a suitable object for historical enquiry? Given that individuality is indeed this reality, it is not possible to decide which individuality is worth. If we treat individuality as a general phenomenon then history is merely anthropology, which uses the particular personality as a sample to establish the general course of development of mankind under evolutionary presuppositions.

Rickert's concern that this is a misrepresentation of the proper task of historical investigation goes hand in hand with previous, though perhaps less sophisticated attacks, by Meyer and the Prussian School against materialistic and positivistic approaches in historiography, which started to gain increasing popularity amongst liberals and socialists. Rickert explained their epistemological interest in the material and socio-material forces in society on the basis of their idealisation of democracy and socialism as their 'guiding cultural idea'. From this he concludes that those people have 'therefore the inclination...to regard the great characters of the past as "unimportant" and hence to endorse those phenomena which the masses have created. In addition, the stance of the proletariat emphasises more the animal [or material] values, hence only this is truly "essential" [in their understanding of history], which stands in a direct relation to them that were the economic concerns.'<sup>203</sup> As a consequence, Rickert asserts that the materialist emphasis of the conditions of proletarian culture and the relentless criticism of established political institutions of his time are derived from an idealisation of human needs and class conflict. In other words, the materialist historiography claims to explain the emergence of all social phenomena on the grounds of a socio-economic determinism *a là* Marx and Mehring.<sup>204</sup> According to Rickert this explains why the new historiography has abandoned

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<sup>202</sup> See our discussion Part I.2.vii.

<sup>203</sup> Rickert (1899) p. 60 f.

<sup>204</sup> Although, this criticism may be logically coherent, Rickert does not acknowledge that neither Marx nor Mehring ignored the importance of the historical event and the possible irrational decision making process of leading historical personalities. See Marx *The German Ideology* (esp. part B on Napoleon or the

historical individuality. Rickert does not deny the existence of such class conflicts, but simply maintained that they are not the only such forces, without paying much attention to such phenomena anyway.

Historical individuality is called by Rickert 'in—dividuality', as derived from the 'in—dividual'. Such an 'in—dividual' is a phenomenon, which possesses uniqueness, coherence and consistency; the birth of Christ for example. It stands out as a phenomenon, because it has value to us in the way that it constitutes an irreplaceable unique experience to us, positively or negatively. The historian then attaches naturally a certain value to the event, which is of interest to him in the same way as a certain human being stresses an interest in a particular event in her or his life, which she or he finds at the moment of judgement important to him or her (e.g. marriage, divorce, a physical achievement or a discussion with a friend). This 'in—dividual' becomes a historic individual and therefore an object of historical interest if it is conceptualised in a particular 'value relation' ('*Wertbeziehung*') to the judging historian. This '*Wertbeziehung*' is intrinsic to the ideographic sciences. This is to say, a historical science, which ignores the value relation between the observer and the in—dividual extinguishes the possibility of historical knowledge.

If Rickert's project does indeed aim to succeed in showing that rational concept formation in history is possible, these principles must then have an objective and binding character for the historian whether the historian is willing to acknowledge them or not. Given the *biatus irrationalis* it must be possible to arrive at these principles, which are the conditions for historical knowledge by reasoning alone. These principles must face the historian as a categorical imperative of reason. The credible historian will reason and resist any temptation to produce the historically valuable through 'magic', but must test them against the constraining principles of validity of historical knowledge. These essential principles are according to Rickert the 'historical centre', secondly the 'general cultural values' and thirdly, the 'value-valuation dichotomy'.

The 'historical centre' is constituted by the historical personalities, 'because of their practical value commitments—transposed into the theoretical value relevance—define the subject matter of history.' A phenomenon, such as the French Revolution becomes only a subject matter for history if it is an 'in—dividual', if it expresses identifiable

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advancements of the technical revolution). Debate could emerge however over which factor does count as a 'world historical fact.'. Cf. Friedrich Engels (1907).

values, which stem from identifiable persons. Consequently, the historical inquiry deals for Rickert with the ambitions, desires, passions and reasons i.e. with the 'mental life', which in one way or another manifests itself in events.<sup>205</sup> The historical accident and the intended event have their roots with the value system of those characters who dominated the event, for example, Joseph Sieyès or the Marquis de La Fayette. The realm of values is thus inextricably linked with the cultural sciences and with history. Hence, from the formal concept of the historical method, we finally arrive at the substantive character of the historical material.<sup>206</sup> 'The value governing conceptualisation are always to be arrived from the historical material itself. That is, they must always be values with regard to which the beings or centres themselves - the object of the representation - act in a valuative fashion.'<sup>207</sup>

However, the 'historical centres' alone cannot show us which event or individual should become an object of historical study. Every human being is according to Rickert, by nature an in—dividual, since we all possess and express values and apply these values to the past of mankind in what ever we feel has continuous importance for us. The connection to Meyer at this point become perhaps most apparent when we look at the second of Rickert's criteria. 'General cultural values'. This means that historical in—dividuality distinguishes itself from in—dividuality in the sense that the historical in—dividual with his particular value system is still of some cultural relevance to us or should still be acknowledged as culturally valuable, a kind of value everyone acknowledges or is capable of acknowledging, whether he appreciates or condemns it. The historian, according to Rickert, has to take the positive and negative aspects of an event or object into account. He may despise the course and outcome of the French Revolution, but he should still report it, since it affected and affects Western culture significantly. Only the value neutral objects can be neglected. For example, a certain stone may have been used as an important tool to shape other stones as hand axes or to carve an important monument. It also may have been used as a weapon in a crucial war. All these aspects have to be incorporated by the historian in his assessment of the historical significance of this tool. However, the inquiry of physical and chemical composition of this stone tool should not be his main focus since this is the office of the

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<sup>205</sup> Rickert (1902) p. 116.

<sup>206</sup> Rickert (1902) p. 121.

<sup>207</sup> Rickert (1902) p. 127.

mineralogist in our example. The war, the monument or the cultural importance of an ancient tribe should be in the focus of his attention.

Two problems arise from this. Firstly, there seems to be a difficulty for the historian to determine, whether a certain object, an amphorae at Hadrian's wall, for example, is regarded as culturally significant, and if so what kind of significance the historian ascribes to it. This applies also to the importance of 'commerce' in antiquity. Just because commerce gained an essential status in the development of capitalism in the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> century, it does not follow that commerce was equally essential during the classical period, for example. Secondly, Rickert needs to show, given a certain culture that does not acknowledge the anthropological importance of 'trading' amphorae for money for example, that he uses the term commerce adequately. The 'economic' concept of 'bank', can be described as a safe place to keep money. But this description is too simplistic. Does the space under a mattress count as a bank? Even if we argue that a bank is a place where finances are kept behind sealed doors during night-time, this would still leave us with a far too vague a definition. The linguistic use of the term, indeed the formation of the entire concept of 'bank' is bound up with modern economic institutions and cultural peculiarities with modern purpose and moral values. Unless someone is prepared to equate modern society qualitatively with the entire ancient civilisation and to apply such concepts such as 'banking' and 'commerce' uncritically to the political life in the ancient world, which was itself highly complex in matters of political organisation and ethical standards, the need emerges to formulate meaningful concepts which address the problem of historicity of 'economic' concepts. One could however assert that a certain anachronism in the reading of history is almost necessary in order to bring the past to light. For example, we know that the ancient Greeks kept coinage in their mouths when strolling over the *agora*. When we now suggest that they wanted to protect themselves from having their money stolen by beggars and thieves, must we not infer by doing so, that the ancients were even more worried about their possessions than we are? Is such an interpretation of historical evidence completely unreasonable?

Rickert argued that 'culture is the domain of meaning defined by value relevancies that are articulated in terms of cultural values. Nature is the domain of the meaningless-reality conceived as independent of values'.<sup>208</sup> The object of the natural sciences aims to find value free theoretical abstractions. For example, water freezes at 0

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<sup>208</sup> Oaks (1988) p. 83.

°C, which does not constitute for Rickert a value judgement (*Werturteil*) unless I try to influence someone not to try to walk on icy water if its temperature is slightly above that mark. This is to say that the above process of water freezing at 0 °C has no meaning or value in itself. The French Revolution, however, has a meaning for us in one way or another. However, since in the cultural sciences 'the concept of value is connected with the concept of the historical in such a way that the only reality represented historically is reality as related to a value. And since the concept of the mental is linked with the concept of the value in such a way that only mental beings are valuating beings, then the concept of the value also establishes a relationship between the mental [*dem Geistigen*] and the historical [*dem Historischen*]'.<sup>209</sup>

However, even if two or more individuals share certain cultural values over 'historical centres' both principles are still not sufficient to eliminate the danger of a culturally relativist and subjectivist account of historical knowledge. Rickert introduced the value-valuation (*Wert-Wertung*) dichotomy in order to solve this problem. Here perhaps we should clarify that 'world' and 'reality' are not synonymous for Rickert. What the world is can only be understood as a combination of reality and value. The latter do not exist as objects in the world but as objects of human understanding. On the one hand, part of the historical interpretation of an event is an inquiry into the relation between values and cultural artefacts (goods) and, on the other hand, values and the act of valuation which is tied to the subject.<sup>210</sup> A hand axe, for example, is an artefact that has no value in itself but since it is intended to fulfil a certain function, it has value in respect of some apparent end. This value should not be confused with the values or the act of valuation of the historian. The 'value-good' relationship (*Wert-Gut Beziehung*) is something the historian has to uncover, it is his object of inquiry, but the act of valuation itself is also dependent on the values of the historian. Therefore, goods and valuations are not the same as values.<sup>211</sup> Goods and valuations exist, but values are neither subjective nor objective entities. However, the appearance of what we call 'good' is dependent not only on the object but also on our valuation of it. It must then be the form of conceptualisation of the object by our own reasoning that is what we call a value. This makes the value itself impossible to describe. Indeed, we end up with Rickert's definition that values are situated

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<sup>209</sup> Rickert (1902) p. 121.

<sup>210</sup> See Oaks (1988) p. 99.

<sup>211</sup> Rickert p. 199 in Oaks (1988) p. 101 n16.

'in an autonomous sphere that lies beyond subject and object.'<sup>212</sup> This sphere, since beyond our understanding and not definable as an object, leaves us then with no further possibility of defining 'value' as an irreducible external proposition. It is however difficult to see what worth such a definition of value has if it is non-definable, but for some reason it is, according to Rickert, still apparent to us. The historian then faces the problem of outlining which value possesses 'validity' (*Geltung*). This is to say, on what basis can the historian claim that his interpretation of a historic event, the French Revolution for example, has a particular value or place in world history. In order to achieve any kind of 'objectivity' about the documentation and the interpretation of the event, the values cannot just remain subjective - they must be universalisable if the event should be of any worth beyond the subjective or culturally (i.e. inter-subjective) determined evaluation.

As for Kant, an authority that claims to be the guardian of moral truth - duty and loyalty - cannot simply dictate the objective moral validity (*Geltung*) of an action. Logical and ethical validity of propositions must then be independently and unconditionally valid regardless of any interpersonal approval or disapproval of any number of agents.<sup>213</sup> Rickert uses the example of a 'cultural good such as science', which he defined as 'the search for truth for its own sake'.<sup>214</sup> This good emerged relatively late in European intellectual life and is, according to Rickert, still not understood in its essence by philosophy, 'which is shown in the attempt to originate the truth value [*Wahrheitswert*]' pragmatically in its "utility."<sup>215</sup> This criticism is seemingly directed against the utilitarian and positivistic philosophy, which started to gain popularity in the human sciences. This opens an interesting analogy between Meyer and Rickert. Neither of them argue that the system of what is historically valid is already apparent to the trained historian, i.e. by intuition, but rather becomes clear, by what Rickert would call the 'cultural good' and what Meyer called his methodology.

Rickert argued that it lies in the nature of history and philosophy to treat the 'historic cultural life' of mankind as non-determined and free. This is not to say that any cultural good possesses validity beyond its inter-subjective realm. Our attention must turn to the necessary existence of truth conditions, which are formally definable, universal, non-reducible and apprehensible through pure practical reasoning. That in Rickert's view, moral, epistemological and historical relativism are self-defeating does of course not

<sup>212</sup> Rickert (1910) p. 12.

<sup>213</sup> See the 'father and son example' in Rickert (1914) p. 192 f.

<sup>214</sup> Rickert (1914) p. 183.

establish the existence of a single set of general principles, with which to prove the validity of a particular historical representation. This is to say, the value-relevancies can hold independently of the valuations.

The key here is Rickert's presupposition that 'culture exists only in a community whose members regard certain values as a common concern - that is, as normatively general values- and therefore, freely or autonomously take a position to them.'<sup>216</sup> 'Whenever social individuals regard the cultivation of goods as a common concern', their actions become an object of historical inquiry. This historical inquiry only has validity if the historian puts himself under the fewest moral and at the same time most rational 'presuppositions - a standpoint of the formal affirmation of values by the autonomous will...As a result we are especially obliged to ascribe objective significance to the individuality of these historical acts of will.'<sup>217</sup> 'The historian is always guided by the substantially defined values that he has to abstract from the historical, cultural life itself with which he is concerned.' Its importance stems from the fact that it has in some respect a meaning for us.<sup>218</sup> Rickert does not prescribe any particular set of principles, which determine the historian's ethos. Clearly though, he deals with the methodology of the cultural sciences, which suggests that the historical valuation should express a value-relevancy and an awareness of his own practical and theoretical interests. The historian's valuation itself is, however, always dependent on the historians' standpoint. For example, whether the Second Punic War (218-201 BC), which resulted in Roman hegemony over the western Mediterranean, had a positive or negative effect on the ancient civilisation, may always be a subject of controversy. According to Rickert, however, that the event itself has had some positive or negative importance can not be disputed.

We can infer from this that with respect to the Bücher-Meyer Controversy, the positive or negative significance of 'commerce' in classical antiquity for the demise of Hellas, can be a matter of dispute. From Rickert's rejection of Lamprecht's method for the cultural sciences, we must conclude that the debate over the character of the economic development of antiquity involves a clash of different methodological axioms. Bücher and Meyer do not simply disagree over matters of which events have positive or negative significance, but also over the value-relevance. For Rickert, if the methodology of the natural sciences is applied to the cultural sciences, as it had been in Lamprecht's case, then

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<sup>215</sup> Rickert (1913) p. 296.

<sup>216</sup> Rickert (1902) p. 706.

<sup>217</sup> Rickert (1902) p. 234.

this seems to fail to acknowledge the existence of 'the sphere of purely theoretical value relations that are independent of their valuation.'<sup>219</sup> This stems from Rickert's brisk opposition to August Comte's approach of proceeding with the methodology of the natural sciences to uncover "historical laws" and rejecting the teleological and value relevant character of history. 'Lamprecht's division of human history into cultural ages can serve as a typical example of a lack of conceptual rigor that creates flaws in every philosophy of history, which pretends to employ a natural scientific method'.<sup>220</sup> The fundamental flaw in Lamprecht's method lies in the open contradiction between denying the teleological nature and the value relevance of history. Yet in practice, according to Rickert, Lamprecht makes teleological valuations in the formulation of the principle that history must proceed even to as yet unknown ages in the fashion of the 'increasing intensity of the socio-psychological life.'<sup>221</sup> Rickert's criticism only partly applies to Bücher's theory of economic stages, but indicates Rickert's clear rejection of the comparative and empirical method ever being acceptable as a sound philosophy of history.

To summarise, Windelband's and Rickert's philosophy of value has outlined, besides a further development of Kant's critique of the epistemological categories, a theoretical defence of the fundamental methodological distinction between cultural historical sciences on the one hand and the natural empirical sciences on the other hand. This distinction is not ontological but epistemological. Whereas Ranke, the Prussian School and Meyer defined nationalism and patriotism as the primary values which should guide the historian's act of valuation, Rickert and Windelband were unable to show that certain values possess formally *a priori* objectivity and exist independently from the acknowledgement of the historian. However, the neo-Kantian movement was one of the most powerful traditions during the early quarter of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The appealing nature of Rickert's and Windelband's arguments offered a possibility of continuing the idealistic paradigm formally and gave historicism a modern line of defence against the academically repudiated materialism and positivism in philosophy and history. Windelband's argument that history and biology, for example, can be investigated in an *ideographic* or *nomothetik* way, seems particularly plausible. However, Windelband's argument that proper historical studies must remain in the realm of *Ideographie* could not convince us.

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<sup>218</sup> See Rickert (1902) p. 237.

<sup>219</sup> Oakes (1988) p. 90.

<sup>220</sup> Rickert (1902) p. 184 f.

<sup>221</sup> See Rickert (1902) p. 184.

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With regard to the Bücher-Meyer Controversy, neither Rickert nor Windelband offered a methodological solution to the debate. Alexander Demandt pointed out correctly that ‘taken in a rigorous sense, processes in the natural world are equally non-reversible or irreparable as a particular historical process or event’<sup>222</sup> The discussion about the modern character of the economy during the classical period is partially related to the Kantian preconception that the rational nature of mankind remains unchanged. The same applies to the law-like qualities of nature. Concept formation in history produces and deals with generalising concepts such as church, state, bureaucracy, democracy and so forth. Their validity can only exist if we abstract from their peculiarities.

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<sup>222</sup> Demandt (1998) p. 94.

## 5. Ancient History and the 'Crisis' in Historicism

The scholarly attention which the Bücher-Meyer Controversy received from its very beginning highlights clearly that ancient historians such as Meyer and Beloch were eager to accommodate the generally increasing interest in issues of social and economic history of antiquity.<sup>223</sup> The course, aftermath and publicity of the controversy were moved into the academic public arena due to the methodological and ideological challenges posed by positivism and materialism to the conservative and Rankean dominated historiography during the 1890s.<sup>224</sup> However, in order to understand the complex background of Meyer's and Beloch's harsh criticism of Bücher's thesis, it is not enough to look solely at the political circumstances and the situation of historical studies; an analysis of the particular situation in ancient history will bring to light the intricacies of the dispute.

The study of philology and ancient history traditionally played an elevated role in Germany's education system. Even today, still more than 700,000 pupils at German secondary schools (*Gymnasien*) learn Latin as their first foreign language. The completion of most degrees in the 'philosophical faculties' at German universities still require higher grades in Latin and in some cases even ancient Greek. The affiliation between the Germans and antiquity is an important historical and cultural phenomenon that was much stronger a hundred years ago. We should therefore not underestimate this phenomenon when examining the reaction of the, at that time, firmly established classical, mainly philological, scholarship against the demands for a reorientation and reformation of these disciplines voiced by scholars and politicians mostly from outside the subject. Unlike in other mainly Western European countries, the educational value of possessing an insight into grammatical structure and the development of the Germanic languages from its Latin and Greek roots was seen as an essential educational object. Many of one may call the 'achievements of antiquity', in particular philosophy, art, architecture and Roman law, were traditionally regarded as constituting valuable roots and cultural links between the modern Western civilisation and the ancient Greek and Roman world. Despite the pervasive public belief in technological and economic progress, the value of the ancient achievements was nowhere more cherished and appreciated across the intellectual world

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<sup>223</sup> One should note the ambiguities of the terms 'social' (*sozial*) and 'economic' (*wirtschaftlich*). The modern use of the terms may differ from Meyer's and Bücher's use.

than in Germany during the second part of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. This acknowledged consensus amongst scholars and politicians had never before been seriously challenged.<sup>225</sup>

Already in the Renaissance period a rival of ancient symbolism was visible, which was represented by the use of Greek mythology in the works the neo-humanism in Herder, Schiller and Goethe.<sup>226</sup> The particular value of ancient history was even more accentuated by the sensational archaeological discoveries of the second half of the nineteenth century.<sup>227</sup> The state historical writings of late 18<sup>th</sup> century scholars, Barthold Georg Niebuhr (1776-1831)<sup>228</sup> and later August Boeckh (1785-1867)<sup>229</sup> were still dominated by the interpretation of historical texts and documents of ancient chronologists such as Tucidides. In their immensely influential works in ancient history, both highlighted the importance of the individual and politically dominated character of antiquity, which alongside Ranke made them grandfathers of the Prussian School.

A different approach was taken by Edward Gibbon (1737-1794)<sup>230</sup> and Jacob Burckhardt (1816-1897).<sup>231</sup> Both scholars are equally of elevated standing in classical studies, and started to develop a reading of history from a more cultural perspective.<sup>232</sup> The Enlightenment quest to uncover human nature combined with the vastly increasing philological material formed an interesting new academic discipline, 'Altertumswissenschaft' ('the science of antiquity'), a subject which combined scholarly rigour in textual translation and interpretation with a humanistic fascination for the ancients and the enlightenment idealisation of the *homo rationalis* in a world historical context. Gibbon's enlightenment-typical assumption about the unchanging character of human nature was the key to understanding the infinite diversity of historical events, but was not deemed to oversimplify human nature under one set of presuppositions.<sup>233</sup> In this way, Gibbon distinguished himself clearly from his contemporaries Francis Hutcheson and David Hume.

<sup>224</sup> Schneider (1990) p. 441.

<sup>225</sup> See Meyer (1918).

<sup>226</sup> We only need to look into volume two of Goethe's *Faust* on Proteus in order to realise the central position of mythology and natural philosophy (*Naturphilosophie*). See Goethe (1994) 8219-8358.

<sup>227</sup> The archaeological discoveries around Olympia for example marked the creation of the modern Olympic games. See also the establishment of the Pergamon Museum of Berlin.

<sup>228</sup> See Niebuhr (1828-1832).

<sup>229</sup> See Boeckh (1817).

<sup>230</sup> See Gibbon (1781-1788).

<sup>231</sup> See Burckhardt (1964).

<sup>232</sup> See also on Gibbon in particular Pocock (1996) and on Burckhardt see Christ (1972).

<sup>233</sup> See Pocock (1996) p. 14.

Due to the outstanding scholarly qualities of Gibbon and Burckhardt, Niebuhr and Boeckh, and despite significant methodological and historiographical differences between them, '*Altertumswissenschaft*' achieved a very unique and elevated place amongst the human sciences in particular at German universities from the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. This unifying science emerged from the fusion of the schools of Ulrich Welcker and Karl Ottfried Müller, who both stood in the tradition of Gibbon and Niebuhr. In order to achieve a more complex picture of the ancient world the scholarship had to take new developments and findings into consideration, which sidelined the previous reliance on inscriptions and fragments. *Altertumswissenschaften* also had to inquire into the social and historical significance of archaeological findings and into new sources such as papyri.<sup>234</sup> That the study of cultural and 'economic' phenomena belonged largely to political history should, however, not be forgotten.

The discipline of ancient history of 18<sup>th</sup> century humanism eagerly investigated ancient Greek, Roman and even barbaric law as the crucial aspect for the study of the past. Because of the pre-eminence of the political, the analysis of the legal systems formed the key element to understanding the general operation, or disaffection of a particular state. Taking it a little further, one could argue that only through the establishment of an operating legal system, was a certain culture was able to flourish and to maintain its independent existence from other nations. Somehow a system of functioning custom provided the only opportunity for a social formation which was not dominated by a tyranny or by a chaotic lawlessness.

Gibbon and later Burckhardt were perhaps the first ancient historians who, besides acknowledging the importance of custom in the particular practice of land ownership, argued that the operation of the legal system has a significant influence on the cultural peculiarities and identities of a people. The study of the history of law therefore had a material and a moral implication for the state of a nation. Although neither belittle the importance of the historic personality, it is no longer only the individual - a history of episodes so to say - but critically acclaimed antiquity as a whole which seemed to be an eternal 'source of academic riches', which by the use of careful analogies, allowed comparisons between the different period of antiquity with aspects of modern social life.

Whilst the political historians and the early political economists had difficulties in coming to terms with new social and economic phenomena, ancient history was better

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<sup>234</sup> Wilamowitz (1893) vol 1. p. 11.

prepared to form analogies between past and present.<sup>235</sup> Indeed, instead of the relatively narrow and uncompromising methodology practices within medieval and modern history, the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century saw a vibrant and fairly liberal atmosphere amongst the ancient historians, which led to a more or less friendly admission of the increasingly popular economic and social questions of antiquity. The predominance of the historical personalities and the pre-eminence of the public political life in antiquity remained largely undisputed, but *Altertumswissenschaft* was never so vigorously under pressure to act as a loyal servant to Prussian politics. Nevertheless, just as today, the human sciences had to justify their existence in an increasingly commercial, competitive and progress driven political environment. However, it is not our task to criticise the discipline of ancient history for having had to invent new ways of understanding and of contributing to the burning questions of the late 19<sup>th</sup> century.

Prussian-German nationalism and German patriotism may never have been as strong as amongst philologists and ancient historians as it was amongst the 'state historians' of the Prussian School, but it was nevertheless present in the former disciplines. The wide ranging and influential works of Niebuhr, Gibbon, Burckhardt and Boeckh, on the one hand, and the eager efforts to collect more and more knowledge about the ancient world on the other hand, may have been the reason for a less hostile and fairly open academic research environment at the institutes and departments of ancient history in Germany's universities. Already by the mid 19<sup>th</sup> century *Altertumswissenschaft* focused on almost every branch of ancient culture, art, politics, law and constitutions, linguistics, papyri and craftsmanship, coinage and architecture, family and public life, philosophy and technology and thus unified scholars from increasingly specialised and separate disciplines. It is impressive how quickly, and in what vast quantities, knowledge about the ancients was accumulated, published and exhibited in the newly created national museums around the world.

For most of the second half of the last century after the revolutionary years of 1848-49, a new generation of scholars - Theodor Mommsen (1817-1903), Ulrich Wilamowitz-Möllendorf (1845-1931) and Ernst Curtius (1814-1896) - dominated Roman and Greek history with a more heuristic approach, which surely was in the unifying spirit of *Altertumswissenschaft*.<sup>236</sup> This, however, could suggest that ancient history towards the

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<sup>235</sup> See extensively Gilbert (1990) p. 47 ff. on Burckhardt, his view on antiquity and the concept of 'cultural history'.

<sup>236</sup> See Morenz (1955).

end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century was closer to Lamprecht's concept of 'cultural history' (*Kulturgeschichte*) than it was to the narrative conception of the predominance of the political and the individual in history of the Prussian School.<sup>237</sup> Yet such suggestions would give an inaccurate explanation of the situation. Despite the more liberal orientation of Wilamowitz-Moellendorf, Curtius and Mommsen, *Altertumswissenschaft* was still dominated by the Rankean tradition. Social and economic aspects of antiquity were still analysed primarily from a political perspective i.e. by studying documents of chronologists, which mostly reported and exaggerated the courageous and noble actions of their leaders. There were two reasons for holding on to the predominance of the political and individual in the historical selection process. First of all, the few historiographic considerations in Plato, Aristotle and more so in Seneca show a clear concern for political history and not for social and economic history in the modern sense.<sup>238</sup> This was recognised by Wilamowitz.<sup>239</sup> Secondly, the previously discussed argument that human rationality is a non-changing but discoverable capacity, which allows us to envisage the ancients through our modern eye, opens up the possibility of a recurrence of the spirit and the values of the ancients as outlined in Part II.1.

Nonetheless, as Karl Christ has concluded, the Prussian School did not dominate the field of *Altertumswissenschaft* as heavily as modern history.<sup>240</sup> This could have been because until recently, ancient historians paid fairly little attention to the methodological questions of their subject.<sup>241</sup> Therefore, aspects of social and cultural methodology such as statistics and empirical conjectures could more easily enter the subject unnoticed or at least unchallenged. Another argument for the relative methodological openness of ancient history could also be the stronger influence of humanism in philosophy from the late 15<sup>th</sup> century onwards. The neo-humanists, such as Humboldt and Herder developed a remarkable interest in the issue of slavery (ancient and modern), which was driven by their political agenda. Henri Wallon's *History of Slavery in Antiquity* especially gave the first comparative study on ancient slavery, which aimed to bridge the relation between ancient and modern social questions.<sup>242</sup> This politically charged subject almost invited ancient historians to swift comparisons between modern day politics and the ancient world.

<sup>237</sup> See Lehmann (1995).

<sup>238</sup> It is not necessary for us to enter the ongoing debate about the scope and nature of Aristotle's 'economic' thought. The arguments and the recent literature on this subject were recently critically discussed by Meikle (1995a), (1995b). Cf. Gelesnoff (1923) and Kraus (1905).

<sup>239</sup> See esp. Wilamowitz (1893) vol. 1 p. 100 f.

<sup>240</sup> See Christ (1983) vol. 3 p. 38.

<sup>241</sup> See Finley (1984) p. 265.

Besides this particular topic, the writings of the Greek and Roman historical scholarship of the mid/late 19<sup>th</sup> century focused on one recurring central phenomenon - the decline of the ancient world. Gibbon at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century had already devoted an encyclopaedic work to this subject, which has not lost its fascination and comprehensiveness for present day scholars.

With the debate over the demise of the ancient culture starting to take centre stage in the *Altertumswissenschaften*, the issue of the proper methodological tools required in order to reach a wide audience did not pass without dispute. Eduard Meyer and Wilamowitz debated this issue even before the '*Lamprechtstreit*'.<sup>243</sup> Although the reaction against the materialistic and positivistic tendencies in history was not as bellicose as in modern historical studies, it is hardly unsurprising that the alleged 'crisis' in German historical studies towards the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century left ancient history not unaffected, which gave the dispute over the decline of the ancient world renewed popularity.<sup>244</sup> Since 'economic' factors are central to both Bücher's and Meyer's theses, though in a different way, we can see that the relative methodological disunity and confusion led to divisions within the discipline of ancient history. The scholars of this discipline also generated a large amount of polemical writing also as a reaction against debates elsewhere, namely the '*Lamprechtstreit*' and the '*Gothein-Schäfer*' dispute.

Methodological disunity and the debate about the usefulness of ancient history have a long and intense history. The first significant reorientation of classical studies reaches back to just after the period of the reformation wars between the old metaphysical world and the spirit of enlightenment with its urge for scientific and commercial progress. However, the medieval scholars did not study the ancient classics for their own sake. Classical texts by scholars such as Aristotle, Plato, Seneca and Cicero were regarded as eternal treasures and as a powerful source of knowledge for theology and ethical education, medicine and mathematics, physics and biology. The battle of the books - *La Querelle* - marked the time in history where modern sciences parted with their metaphysical roots and started to develop their own methods based on the empirical method of experiment and observation. This movement alone did not lead to a radical methodological reorientation of the philological practices of the medieval period, but rather reflected the effort by the Newtonian scientists to gain scientific and authoritative independence from the church.

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<sup>242</sup> Brockmeyer (1979) p. 19.

<sup>243</sup> Christ (1980) p. 230 ff.

<sup>244</sup> Metz (1984) p. 3.

Before empiricism and the enlightenment ideal of progress and commerce could take hold of Western culture, almost all knowledge of the world was based on the achievements of antiquity and was administered by the church in order to provide a unified scientific world view, which was in accordance to the Gospel.<sup>245</sup> Faith, ethical self-control, religious obedience, material self-sufficiency and the dogmatic defence of ancient wisdom, was for the progress-minded band of scientists and philosophers *à la* Hobbes only metaphysical balderdash.<sup>246</sup> The new and increasingly independent natural sciences treated antiquity as the enemy of reason and condemned it as mere mysticism, especially in France and England. Wilamowitz, for example, regretted in the light of contemporary hostility against *Altertums-wissenschaft* by the sciences that although 'France has taken the lead in civilised progress from the start of the sixteenth century, and during that century made an immense contribution to classical studies; and it was France that now took the lead in their abandonment.'<sup>247</sup>

However, the neo-humanist movement, especially in Germany, kept an outspoken affiliation for the humane, natural and in parts also tragic character of the ancient view of human existence; an aspect, which according to them, was disfigured by the medieval orthodoxy. This movement was essential for the great interest that Lessing, Schiller, Goethe, but also Humboldt and Herder, took in the mythology and philosophy of antiquity. They did not abandon antiquity, but rather incorporated it into their spirit of enlightenment. The works of the ancient poets, philosophers and statesman were mostly admired for their intellectual depth and expression of aesthetic beauty and harmony.<sup>248</sup> Towards the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, philology began its independent existence in German university *curricula*, but focused at that time solely on the linguistic interpretation of classical texts.

However, 'the existing tradition of textual scholarship was gradually strangled by the new enthusiasm of the artistic cult for Greek antiquity',<sup>249</sup> which led nevertheless to an increased of interest in ancient city life and its architecture. This obvious neo-classical

<sup>245</sup> Perhaps regard Dante's *Divine Comedy* was the last major work, which aimed to incorporate all available knowledge under the roof of Christianity. See Mazzeo (1960) and Ittorini (1957).

<sup>246</sup> See Meikle (1995c) p. 77 f. For examples of late 19<sup>th</sup> century faith in 'economics' as a progressive science see Mitscherlich (1910)

<sup>247</sup> Wilamowitz-Möllendorf (1982) p. 8. It is perhaps of interest for the reader too that despite Wilamowitz's relatively liberal dispositions, after having taken office as principal of the University of Berlin he was responsible for the removal of the memorial statue in honour Hermann von Helmholtz, one of the leading German humanist and scientist, from entrance of the university. 'It does not befit that the natural sciences arrogate themselves a place of domination.' Cit. in Demandt (1998) p. 84.

<sup>248</sup> Not only since Meyer do we know of an enlightenment period of antiquity, but also Ranke and Hegel spoke of such periods, which was associated mainly with the classical period. See Simon (1928), Müller (1997) and Schmidt (1998).

trend during the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century was caused by yet another controversy about the value of *Altertumswissenschaft* beyond the existing popular enthusiasm for archaeological findings and ‘neo-classical’ architectural style.

Ever since August Boeckh’s *Public Finances of Athens* (the first volume was published in 1817)<sup>250</sup> the amount of remarkably well researched literature on aspects of ancient ‘economic’ and social life was on an increase. After Boeckh, Mommsen and Wilamowitz continued to highlight social and ‘economic’ aspects of antiquity, but more from a historical than from a perspective of accountancy and finance. Their successful publications helped *Altertumswissenschaft* more popularity and high degree of specialisation, which reached impressive heights as the early issues of such currently prominent journals like *Rheinisches Museum*, *Klio* and *Zeitschrift der Savigny Stiftung* clearly demonstrate to us. However, by the time Nietzsche became professor of philology at Basel, the whole excitement of *Altertumswissenschaft* seemed to have vanished and been replaced by meticulous analysis, which one may call out of touch with the outside world. This was apparently one of Nietzsche’s main reasons to give up his chair.<sup>251</sup>

Towards the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century the degree of specialisation reached such a dimension of detail and abstraction that the familiar, ever recurring and pervasive criticism about the lack of practical applicability, marketability and general educational usefulness of the research results were voiced louder and more intensively. This criticism went also hand in glove with the demands to justify the amount of funding for the various academic departments, research institutes and the classical education in the *Gymnasia*.<sup>252</sup>

However, around 1890, just before the Bücher-Meyer Controversy, the *Altertumswissenschaft* found itself in a rather uncomfortable position. The reformation of the German secondary school system (‘*Gymnasialsystem*’) forced the demand for a more German and national view on history. ‘Young Germans should be educated and not young

<sup>249</sup> Wilamowitz (1982) p. 12.

<sup>250</sup> See Boeckh (1817).

<sup>251</sup> Although Wilamowitz admired Nietzsche initially (He followed Nietzsche to Schulpforta and Bonn), he eventually fell out with his former idol when Nietzsche was offered a professorship at Basel aged only twenty four. Nietzsche’s *The Birth of the Tragedy* of 1864 was dismissed by Wilamowitz for its apparent inaccuracies and snobbery. Nietzsche in return accused the philological scholarship (except Jacob Burckhardt) from Goethe to his present for their apparent Hippocratic claim that ancient philosophers adored mostly themselves. Nietzsche claimed that this applies rather to the accusers, the modern scholarship, than to the accused. For Nietzsche it was important to ‘enter’ antiquity with imagination, care and not by assuming that the modern man, in particular enlightened philosophers and their modernist followers, were similar to the ancients.

<sup>252</sup> With regard to the situation at the university departments, Karl Julius Beloch, complained that even right into the early part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, *Altertumswissenschaft* was dominated by philologists and lacked good historians. Beloch (1925) p. p. 22.

Greeks and Romans', was the harsh and uncompromising critique of Kaiser Wilhelm II, which must have hit the usually very loyal and conservative ancient historical scholarship very hard indeed. However, the rejection of the Kaiser's claim was not so much directed against the instrumentalisation of ancient history as an important educational tool, but the assertion that these scholars did not do their job well. Resistance against such attempts to belittle the tradition of what classical studies had achieved in the education of the juvenile 'state's citizen' (*Staatsbürger*) came promptly from many southern German ancient historians, a fact which contributed apparently to the convocation of the 1<sup>st</sup> German Historians Conference in 1893 in München at which Bücher held his controversial paper '*Die Entstehung der Volkswirtschaft*'.<sup>253</sup> As a result of the Kaiser's demands, the modernised secondary school curriculum was though largely rejected by the philological scholarship. However, it was implemented by the government anyway starting from the winter semester 1892-93.<sup>254</sup> The educational political interest shifted from ancient and medieval history to modern events and personalities.<sup>255</sup> This forced the classical scholarship into a dilemma. Either classical scholarship would have to answer the call and make ancient history and classical philology directly applicable for the nationalistic pedagogic ideals of Prussian Germany, which would require an even stronger modernisation of antiquity. Or they could insist on the historical and cultural peculiarity of antiquity and simply highlight the classical languages as a general educational value in its own right, which would surely result in negative consequences with regard to the already damaged status and academic funding of ancient history. Behind this official ideological appeal stood the idea that history (including ancient political history) had to fulfil a wider political function, since the 'right' education was and probably still is central to the goals of any ambitious nation. In the light of the degree of specialisation for its own sake and isolation from the burning questions of its time, the Kaiser's criticism might have been well justified. Those scholars who tended to follow Niebuhr's and Ranke's method, especially Meyer and Beloch, emphasised throughout their works the value of ancient history for modern education and the German nation, which presupposes the presence of a shared cultural rationale between the ancients and the modern man. Some modern historians such as Below and Meinecke were, however, sceptical about the pedagogic applicability of the results of the rather fragmented and eclectic *Alttertumswissenschaften*.

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<sup>253</sup> See Schumann (1974) p. 195 and Ritter (1953) p. 514.

<sup>254</sup> Schneider (1990) p. 425.

<sup>255</sup> Paulsen (1885) p. 600 ff.

The Munich Ordinarius, Robert von Pöhlmann, brought the intentions of the governing bodies under a summary in which he defended the Kaiser's calls for the wider political utilisation of history, but rubbished the Kaiser's criticism against ancient history for not following this path. 'Amongst the plenitude of complaints, which in our days flow against the humanistic studies, none are as painful and of highest interest for the nation as the one, which we recently heard from the Kaiser that the humanistic secondary schools failed to educate those professional classes sufficiently, which have an influence on people's lives, which aim to preserve the modern state....If the school would have done so, said the Kaiser, the humanistic youth would have provided the material needed in order to fight against the socialist movement.'<sup>256</sup> We see that Pöhlmann's intention was to refute the opinion that ancient history was of no considerable importance for the political education of pupils. Pöhlmann elucidates his view by claiming that Aristotle's *Politics* is comparable with the most recent demands for a political education of the youth.<sup>257</sup>

To be clear, most ancient historians did not argue against a social and political education of the young, but rather against the modernisation of the discipline history in which ancient history has been crowded out, since it apparently failed to do its bit in the ongoing and intensifying campaign against socialism. However, as Schneider noted, 'the present relevance of historiography originates for Pöhlmann by no means from a progressive political consciousness, but serves rather as support for the monarchy'.<sup>258</sup>

A basis for the modernisation of ancient history was laid down by ancient history itself. The prominent Mommsen argued, for example, 'it is essential that the ancients step down from their shrines back into the real world, in which there is hammering and sawing, in which people hate and love, fantasise and lie. That is the reason as to why the consul had to become a mayor'.<sup>259</sup> In other words, Mommsen was demanding that classical education should bring the ancients closer to us in order to make them look more ordinary people. The idealisation or glorification of the ancient world by neo-humanism is to be replaced by a more realistic and up to date view of antiquity. This includes the demands for a reinterpretation of Roman and Greek institutions by using more modern concepts and terminology, which somehow correspond to the important issues of Mommsen's time. This led to the drawing of parallels between the class struggle in late Roman empire and

<sup>256</sup> Pöhlmann 'The Classical Antiquity in its importance for the political education of the modern citizen' in Pöhlmann (1911) 1<sup>st</sup> ed. (1895) p. 1 ff.

<sup>257</sup> Pöhlmann (1911). p. 19 ff. For Pöhlmann see also the appendix to this part.

<sup>258</sup> Schneider (1990). p. 427.

<sup>259</sup> On Mommsen's political views see Wucher (1968), Christ (1972). pp. 68-118.

the social division in many European countries in the mid 19 century.<sup>260</sup> In his comments to Mommsen's highly praised encyclopaedic textbook *Römische Geschichte*, Bachofen objected that 'in general Mommsen rarely deals with Rome and the Romans. The essence of the book lies in the effort to realise the latest ideas of the time'.<sup>261</sup>

That the modernisation of the ancient world often went too far, was even mourned by Pöhlmann, who himself was not always the one of the most restrained historians with regard to drawing direct analogies between the ancient and the modern 'social question'. However, Pöhlmann is correct to assert that ancient Greek and Roman history was heavily used for political ends not only during the years of the struggle for Germany's national unity but also right into the 20<sup>th</sup> century. He pointed out that 'one of the big problems which the national education has left with us from the last century, is foremost the critique of the cultural inheritance of antiquity... Yet this process of settlement of the modern man with the intellectual baggage of antiquity made it very difficult, if not sometimes impossible to reach a non-biased, strictly historical view and judgement of antiquity. With regard to the question, how important the ancients are for us, especially the people of ancient Greece, one did all too often ignore and misinterpreted what antiquity was really about, "how it really was". One invented a picture of Hellenism in ways it was respectively needed or seen useful to these historians.'<sup>262</sup>

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<sup>260</sup> Wehler (1972) vol. 4, p. 21 and Christ (1983) vol. 3, p. 45 f.

<sup>261</sup> Bachofen vol X. (1967) pp. 251,254, 262 cited in Christ (1982) 75 ff.

<sup>262</sup> Pöhlmann 'Die Geschichte der Griechen und das 19. Jahrhundert' cited in Funke (1998) p. 17.

## 6. Historicism and Political Economy

The reservations of the Prussian School, the debates on method in historical studies, the neo-Kantian approach reviving philosophy and the situation in ancient history all combined to oppose the influx of a new methodological and ideological spirit into the human sciences. A further major factor responsible for the emergence and the dissatisfying outcome of the Bücher-Meyer Controversy, we suggest, is the situation in Karl Bücher's area of expertise, *Nationalökonomie* (the science of the national economy). As we have seen, Bücher emphasised the self-sufficient character of the ancient economy with commercial trade playing a negligible role. We also saw that Bücher, like many, viewed ancient economic life in the context of the general line of development of the human economy as underdeveloped, basic or primitive. This view became popular in the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century and was held by many economists, who in terms of their methodology, favoured the empirical and materialistic approaches.<sup>263</sup>

The emergence of theoretical political economy as a new and separate science during the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century was strongly connected with European and American governmental efforts to control the forces of rapidly expanding markets in order to use its benefits for political ends. Whilst socialists, sections of the German liberals and conservatives agreed at least on the need to control and influence the market forces, though for very different political reasons, Anglo-Saxon economists saw traditionally only a limited need for economic policies, since the neo-classical tradition regarded it as an obstacle which would hinder economic progress and prosperity. Depending on one's political stance, the approaches towards the character of the economy differed drastically. There was, despite all fundamental differences, an agreement on the enormous importance of the economic sphere in the modern world. Such views occurred with the epoch-making works of Smith, Ricardo and Marx. Their value theory of labour and critique of 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> century capitalism and its social phenomena were not seriously considered in Germany until the later part of the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. This rather overdue critical acknowledgement of the so called Classical economists might also be connected to the late but dramatic industrial development and technological progress, which changed

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<sup>263</sup> Note the ambiguous character of the concepts 'economic', 'economy' and also 'materialism and empiricism'.

Germany's urban and rural everyday life on an unprecedented scale, especially in the change to last part of the 19<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>264</sup> It was during this period that political economy started to establish itself as a political science by analysing unique phenomena such as urban and rural industrialisation, market failures, and concentration of capital and mass poverty. However, theoretical analysis of such phenomena alone was not enough to satisfy politicians who sought practical advice to cope with and address the recurring and deepening economic crisis, the rise of a strong and well organised working class movement, mass poverty, inflation, trade deficits and demographic growth.

The pervasive intellectual spirit of the time was, despite substantial differences, clearly bound up with the enlightenment ideals of progress, confidence and optimism about man's abilities to overcome the challenges of 'mother nature' and society. This was to be achieved by putting faith in technological inventions, statistics and formulas, which gave the natural sciences and statistical empiricism an advantage compared to idealism, in the popular view.

However, just as in history, philosophy and classics, German idealism and neo-humanism played an essential part in the establishment of political economy as a credible and independent science. Friedrich List (1789-1846)<sup>265</sup>, Adam Müller (1779-1829) and Friedrich Karl Savigny (1779-1861) believed, as did Niebuhr, Ranke, Gibbon and Burckhardt, that the political precedes the material and social life. The inductive historical inquiry therefore maintained its key position in the analysis of economic phenomena. Following in the tradition of the above scholars a group of academics including Wilhelm Roscher (1817-1894),<sup>266</sup> formed what is often called the 'German Historical School' (*Deutsche Historische Schule*).

Roscher, though, distanced himself from the Hegelian idea of a single universal theoretical system by arguing that economic behaviour and thus economic principles were contingent upon their historical, social and institutional context. Therefore in order to

<sup>264</sup> Winkel (1977) p. 7 ff.

<sup>265</sup> List's most influential work was 'The National System of Political Economy' (*Das Nationale System der Politischen Ökonomie*) of 1837, which was written as a polemic to the free-trade doctrines that was predominant in classical political economy. However, this book was by no means an ideological defence of protectionism as one finds in Müller, but rather stressed the pre-eminence of the political, the nation and the state. List argued that it was the government's responsibility to foster the 'productive powers' of a nation and, once these were in place, free trade could ensue can flourish but not before the general fiscal restrictions and legal regulations are in place. More relevantly, he developed a theory of economic "stages" which was to serve as a valuable basis for the 'younger generation' of German Historical School to which Karl Bücher belonged. List was one of the main architects of the German customs union (*Zollverein*) and an advocate for the expansion of railroads throughout Germany.

establish economic laws, the method of inquiry must draw from history and sociology, and is hence interdisciplinary. That is to say, one must look at economic life with the eye of a historian and political scientist as well as an economist. Hence, the first task for Roscher was to analyse history for its economic content in order to arrive at theories of the nature of the relationship between social and economic organisation of society. In order to do so, Roscher extensively explored the fields of ancient and mediaeval history.<sup>267</sup> As a result of Roscher's mainly inductive methodological approach much of the work of the early Historical School, especially in the work of Roscher's colleagues, Bruno Hildebrand (1812-1878) and Karl Knies (1812-1898), was characterised by theories of stages of economic development ('*wirtschaftliche Entwicklungstufen*'). Indeed, as sketched out in part I, theories of economic stages, whether linear (as in Knies, Hildebrand and Bücher) or cyclic (as in Roscher and Meyer) were quite a common methodological tool.<sup>268</sup>

The 'older generation' of the Historical School rejected the descriptive orientation of classical political economy in Ricardo, Say, Bentham and Mill and did not tolerate a theoretical plurality and openness of Roscher's method. During the last quarter of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, as in history and the classics, the old and somewhat worn-out idealistic paradigm began to come under fire from the increasingly popular empirical and positivistic tendencies, which sought to challenge a diversity of methods in favour of the universal empirical and solely descriptive method.

The main threat stemmed from the 'Marginalist Revolution' around Jevons, Walras, and Menger who in 1883 instigated the so-called '*Methodenstreit*' ('debate on method' - not to be confused with the *Lamprechtstreit*), which resulted in a shift from the predominantly normative and highly politically instrumentalised inductive historical method in the direction of Menger's, Jevons' and Walras' 'Marginalist Austrian School'. In 1883 Menger published a work on the method of social science and political economy, which he intended to be a challenge to the Historical School.<sup>269</sup> Gustav Schmoller (1838-1917), who was one of the most sceptical voices amongst the 'younger generation' of the Historical School, attacked the Austrian School and neo-classical economists for their theories of economic genesis and for pretending to be using solely descriptive methods.<sup>270</sup>

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<sup>266</sup> See Roscher (1843). This work on the historical method served a key work for the wider methodological orientation of the Historical School.

<sup>267</sup> See Also his remarks on the relationship of political economy and classical studies in Roscher (1864).

<sup>268</sup> On the history and critique of such theories see Reil (1940). Such theories were only critically analysed and criticised in the 1930s. See also Heichelheim (1932).

<sup>269</sup> See Menger (1883).

<sup>270</sup> See Schmoller (1874).

Much of the work undertaken or initiated by Schmoller was directed largely to microscopic analysis of political and economic history, which was criticised by Böhm-Bawerk, a disciple of Menger.<sup>271</sup> Schmoller's political and methodological opposition to the Austrian School involved him (though probably involuntarily) in a well recognised methodological debate between the two sides, which is also referred to as the '*Methodenstreit*', which should not be confused with the debate around Karl Lamprecht. Although it has been argued that Schmoller lost the debate by not engaging with the arguments raised by his opponents (it is reported that upon receiving Menger's '*Untersuchungen*', he returned the book unread to its author after which he simply noted in a deprecatory manner that, indeed, the work had not even been worth reading.), Schmoller's political involvement was also significant in his rejection of the marginalists. As one of the founders and later chairman of the '*Verein für Sozialpolitik*' ('Association for Social Policy') est. 1873, he advocated a kind of corporate state-industry-labour partnership. The central goal of this still flourishing association of economists and scholars from interconnected disciplines involved, on the one hand, opposing a *laissez faire* philosophy in social policy and, on the other hand, rejecting the revolutionary social ideas of emerging socialism as well. However, heavy debates soon broke out within the *Verein* on how to achieve the association's credo "to raise, educate and reconcile the lower classes on the basis of the existing order". During Schmoller's long presidency (1880-1917) the *Verein* began to develop into a politically 'neutral' and interdisciplinary association in which progressive conservatives, liberals and nationalists found a debating chamber.<sup>272</sup> From the standpoint of the Austrian School and from a Marxist prospective, Schmoller's 'moral economics' was viewed as being a loyal mouthpiece and obedient servant of government and businesses interest, which aimed to control markets and to manipulate the working classes. This was openly confirmed time and time again when the *Verein* would come up with patchy justifications for the industrial and social policies of Bismarck (see also part III). Economics, Schmoller and his followers claimed, was inherently a normative discipline and thus should be employed in order to provide tools for policy makers. In their view, history provides us with the necessary illustrations and examples in order to solve a particular social problem, such as urban

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<sup>271</sup> 'We have evidently a double task: we must by means of an improved, more careful, process, a stricter "distillation," extract the countless grains of truth still in the old one, and we must at the same time mine new empirical material for future refining, the richer the better. But what would the historical school have instead? They would first of all open an era devoted to the collection of materials. They would have, first of all, in addition to the enormous mountain of raw material which lies still untouched, a second mass, if possible still larger than the first, before we begin again to "distil".' See Böhm-Bawerk (1890) p. 20.

<sup>272</sup> For a detailed study about debates and political agenda within the *Verein* see Lindenlaub (1967).

overcrowding and mass poverty. The semi-engagement of Schmoller's Historical School in the *Methodenstreit* highlighted, however, the existence of alternative methods, especially the increasingly popular positivistic and materialistic tendencies within political economy.<sup>273</sup> Although Schmoller retained the methodological and scholarly predominance over the academic chairs in *Nationalökonomie* at Germany's universities into the late 1920s, the trend towards an increased plurality for new methodological approaches including materialism within the academic discipline was clearly visible.<sup>274</sup> Even though Schmoller's attempt to lay out an 'ethical-historical economic theory' may have failed to win popularity in the aftermath of the *Methodenstreit*, his nevertheless sophisticated analysis of social and bureaucratic institutions regarding contemporary theories about the relationship between public institutions and economic policy making was regarded as pioneering.<sup>275</sup>

The members of the 'younger generation' of the Historical School were more critical towards Bismarck, but shared nevertheless his nationalistic ambitions. Indeed, the works of its members, Werner Sombart, Max Weber and Karl Bücher had closer ties to Marx's value theory than Schmoller had, both used primarily a comparative method of historical inquiry in their works in economic history.<sup>276</sup> Weber's, Sombart's and Bücher's method acknowledged the dynamic cause of the relationship of state and society and its material basis, but did not aim to rid themselves of the distinction between between *Natur-* and *Geisteswissenschaft*.<sup>277</sup>

The dedicated support for nationalistic aims of Bismarck remained nevertheless unchanged in Weber, Bücher and Sombart. Besides the fact that Bücher belonged perhaps to the most liberal forces within the *Verein*, the 'younger generation' of the German Historical School differed from the Prussian School significantly in its continuous efforts to stress the political usefulness of economic history and to underline the supremacy of

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<sup>273</sup> It is commonly held that the Austrian School is synonymous with a "subjectivist" method of economic inquiry. This becomes explicit from its most central principles. Firstly, the acknowledgement and importance of uncertainty in the economy. Secondly, the importance of competitive markets as a key force to gain order and stability in the economy. Thirdly, a time-dependent theory of capital. Fourthly, a theory of price and cost formation, which stresses the subjective nature of the commodity value as it is determined by the exchange value only. Other features of the Austrian School are disequilibrium analysis and marginal utility theory. The Austrian School is perhaps most famous for advocating the philosophy of *laissez-faire* as its prime political principle.

<sup>274</sup> Schwedberg (1994) p. 42.

<sup>275</sup> See Priddat (1995).

<sup>276</sup> See Winkel (1977).

<sup>277</sup> See Mommsen's paper 'Karl Lamprecht und Max Weber; Historical Sociology within the Confines of a Historians Controversy' in Mommsen (1987).

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political history over the economy. However, both schools concurred about the essential importance of the state and its institutions for social and economic policy making.

Although Bücher has been accused of materialism and positivism, such assertions seem to be unjustified in the light of his involvement in the *Verein*. His sympathies for Lamprecht, the employment of a common methodological tool and a common empirical attitude towards economic history only made him an enemy for Meyer because the latter was not prepared to let non-historians lead the study of history of antiquity. However, political economy like historical studies in general was under pressure to deliver answers to the central questions of late 19<sup>th</sup> century Germany. Both subjects either modernised the ancients, like Meyer did, or employed a modern methodology which was dominated by the cognitive interests of the economist, as we have seen in Bücher.

## Résumé

The *Lamprechtstreit* about the reorientation of historical studies clearly expressed the apathy of traditional historiography towards new approaches to viewing history and its events from a more sociological and economic basis. This is also a reason as to why Karl Bücher and his followers did not succeed in their claim concerning the self-sufficient character of the household, since it belittled Meyer's more traditionalist view of the character of the state. In combination with the bourgeois tradition at the German institutes of higher education and the closeness of the German academics to the state, the tradition of German idealism dominated the academic world of the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, with its traditional distance from economic and social matters.<sup>278</sup> The polemical course but also the enormous significance of the Bücher-Meyer Controversy should be viewed in the light of the political, social and intellectual debates during and after the last decade of the 19<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>279</sup>

The issues discussed in Bücher-Meyer Controversy were clearly part of the wider dispute over more theoretical and methodological questions regarding the nature of historical explanations. This is often referred to as the '*Methodenstreit*' ('debate on method') around the historian Karl Lamprecht, Bücher's colleague and friend at Leipzig. At the turn of the century the well-established philosophical and historicist positions seemed to have reached a state of crisis as a result of serious pressure from the increasingly popular historical materialistic and positivistic tendencies in historical studies, in classics and in political economy. Karl Lamprecht's 'new method' of historical inquiry combined with aspects of psychoanalytical and sociological method posed a serious threat to the conservative accounts of the well-established event and individualistic orientated historiography. The second half of the 19th century and in particular its last decade saw the emergence of its rival - 'social and economic history' (*Sozial- und Wirtschaftsgeschichte*). This new subject also received increasingly more attention due to dramatic social and political divisions within the 'new-born' German federal nation under the rule of Bismarck's Prussia.

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<sup>278</sup> On the bourgeois character of the German education system see Ringer (1990).

<sup>279</sup> If we would follow Windelband and Rickert, we could not even speak of a controversy between Bücher and Meyer since the cognitive interests and the criteria for the validity of values are not the same.

We aim to show that the crumbling of the traditional paradigm of German Idealism within the academic disciplines of history, classics and political economy, which dominated these subjects throughout the 19<sup>th</sup> century, was not so much due to internal theoretical weaknesses, but mainly related to the rise of positivistic and materialistic methodological and ideological alternatives during that period. The so-called 'social questions' (*Soziale Frage*) and the occurrence of new social and economic phenomena (e.g. unemployment, urbanisation and technological progress) was also reflected on the question of the usefulness of social and economic history in the light of the new social reality.

## Robert von Pöhlmann - 'Socialism' or 'Capitalism' in Antiquity and the Pedagogic Objectives of Ancient History (Appendix to Part II)

The following appendix deals with a more peripheral figure in the Bücher-Meyer Controversy, Robert von Pöhlmann (1852-1914). Although he never actively participated in the debate, his main work 'History of the Social Question and the Socialism of the Ancient World' (1925) and a collection of essays called, 'Of Present and of Antiquity' (1911) became important works for the study of ancient Greek history in the 1920s. Pöhlmann's work was predominantly brought to the attention of the public eye posthumously by his pupil, the long standing professor of ancient Greek history at Bonn, Friedrich Oertel, who himself became involved in the aftermath of the Bücher-Meyer Controversy in the 1930s and 40s. Despite the fact that Pöhlmann did not intervene directly in the dispute, his original position gained attention, and also stimulated critique and controversy amongst the historicist tradition in Germany.<sup>280</sup>

Pöhlmann's schooling at the '*Alte Gymnasium*', (a secondary school with focus on ancient history and philology), paved his way to studying history at Munich, Göttingen and Leipzig. He was strongly influenced during his student years by Heinrich Brunn (philologist, archaeologist and ancient Greek cultural historian), Georg Waitz (ancient Greek political historian and numismatist) and the ancient historian and economist, Wilhelm Roscher, who was probably the most influential upon Pöhlmann.<sup>281</sup> The close academic relationship with Roscher provides a good example of how familiar economists and historians were with each other's material. A bursary provided by the 'King Ludwig II Scholarship' gave him the opportunity to travel to Italy and to complete his doctoral thesis on medieval economic history.<sup>282</sup> His 1879 *Habilitationsschrift* at the Catholic University of Erlangen, entitled 'Hellenic Views about the Connection between Nature and History', indicates already a strong interest in the interdisciplinary areas of ancient history,

<sup>280</sup> There is only a small amount of papers and a few obituaries on Pöhlmann's works and academic achievement. The main literature until the early 1970 is summarised in Christ (1972) p. 201. From this list see Ulrich Wilcken's obituary (1915), also H. Berve (1959). For the most appreciative review of Pöhlmann works see Oertel's 'Supplement' to Pöhlmann (1925).

<sup>281</sup> 'Roscher gave my whole life's work direction and end; he inspired directly my first social-historical studies and was, like to all my later works, sympathetic towards it.' in Roscher (1900) p. 8 After Roscher's death in 1894, Pöhlmann edited the 22<sup>nd</sup>, 23<sup>rd</sup>, and 24<sup>th</sup> edition of Roscher's influential work, *Grundlagen der Nationalökonomie*.(1900), which ironically carries the sub title 'A reader for businessmen and students'.

<sup>282</sup> See Pöhlmann (1878) cited in Christ (1972) p. 204 n4.

topography and philosophy, which laid down the foundation of his future achievements. It also shows that Pöhlmann did not engage into ancient history for its own sake, but engaged eagerly from the start in examining the applicability and importance of ancient history in respect of actual political problems. This can be highlighted with a remark from his PhD thesis: 'If one envisions all these ideas, which alone Plato and Aristotle have outlined concerning questions of the influence of nature on custom and ethics, intelligence and political life, then it becomes more and more obvious, how little new momentum the naturalistic view since Bodin and Montesquieu have added to history.'<sup>283</sup> This is perhaps a good example to highlight that Pöhlmann's later 'infamous' modernising comparisons between the ancient and the modern world do not stem from the trendy affectation for progress and technology of his times, but was rather derived from a strong appreciation of ancient Greek philosophy and its culture. Secondly, like many of his contemporaries, Pöhlmann was deeply concerned about the social-economic and cultural-political situation in Germany and Europe, which led him to apply modern economic concepts in order to show the nature of ancient Greek *polis* life.

The publication of his essay 'Overpopulation of the Ancient Cities' exemplifies Pöhlmann's worries in an even more suggestive fashion.<sup>284</sup> Human overcrowding in the urban centres of central and Western Europe was considered to be a social disease, unnatural and alienating, at least by the conservative scholarship. Pöhlmann's historical work reflected deeply on the social problems in his own day. The dramatic industrial growth and the need for a rapid increase in mobile wage labour as well as the occurrence of modern economic crises in the industrial centres of England and later in France and Germany required urgent attention.

Pöhlmann faced the same problem as his colleague Julius Beloch did: should we interpret the growth of the population in a city as a sign of its prosperity or rather as a 'symptom' of a dawning economic crisis and inevitably a breakdown of the social and political order?<sup>285</sup> In order to deal with such modern phenomena with the means a historian has at hand, Pöhlmann turned to antiquity in the search of any cases, which might resemble the symptoms from which modern cities suffered. The most obvious match, which was already used as a standard example and which is still used today, was that of ancient

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<sup>283</sup> Pöhlmann (1878). p. 74.

<sup>284</sup> Pöhlmann (1884).

<sup>285</sup> See Part I ch. 4.

Rome.<sup>286</sup> However, as many sceptical voices of such modernising methods have maintained, in order to comprehend the complexity of the causes of overcrowding and poverty, one is ill advised to take into account only such factors as the number of civilians, which share a particular living space. Secondly, Pöhlmann should not just have compared the population influx rate with the death rate. With regard to the causes of famine and the outbreak of epidemics, overpopulation may only be one possible cause of social and economic crises. Thankfully though, Pöhlmann spares his readers the details of lengthy statistical calculations, which since Beloch's publication 'The Population of the Greek-Roman World' in 1886 have enthralled economic-historical scholarship.<sup>287</sup>

Pöhlmann does not deliver a detailed explanation as to the full extent to which the situation in ancient Rome provides a valid parallel or analogy to his modern overpopulated urban industrial cities.<sup>288</sup> Even if we grant a direct parallel in the cyclic development of ancient Rome and Western Europe, it is still invalid to blame social discord and poverty in the cities solely on overcrowding. Although Pöhlmann insisted on not exaggerating the political and social peculiarities in Rome in order to soberly capture the sheer scope of growth of this metropolis, it was self-evident to him that a good historian should be capable of delivering a picture of history or a certain historical event, which captures the imagination and arouses the understanding of the interested reader. No doubt this is an honorable goal, which historians have all too often ignored when providing their audiences with minute and antiquarian detail. However, as many critics have pointed out, his almost indiscriminate use of modern terminology and little concern for methodological questions in respect of historical concept formation, put Pöhlmann in the camp of the so called modernisers.<sup>289</sup> As we shall see, such categorisations were unfortunately drawn a little too swiftly. It has also been falsely claimed that Pöhlmann's work shows explicit ties to Marxist historiography.<sup>290</sup> Reasons for such an interpretation lie perhaps in the frequent references to Marx and the use of the terminology of political economics. For example, Pöhlmann acknowledged that Rome gained her wealth more or less from political activities, custom, fees, taxes, blackmail etc., but claimed that other centres such as

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<sup>286</sup> A parallel to Meyer and Beloch becomes apparent, he somehow, amongst many others of their colleagues, held the romantic and idealising view that Rome's rise and demise marks the key momentum 'from which the world received its impulses' Christ (1972) p. 208. On the large amount of literature see e.g. Christ (1970), Lehmann (1993), Love (1991) and Deininger (1989).

<sup>287</sup> Beloch (1886), see also Beloch (1911) and recently an 'economic-financial' study by Cohen (1992) Cf. Meikle (1995a) p. 186 n34.

<sup>288</sup> On the primarily agrarian character of the Roman 'economy' see Weber (1891).

<sup>289</sup> See Humphreys (1977) p. 139 and the critical remarks by Finley (19980) p. 49 f.

<sup>290</sup> See Meikle (1995b) p. 122 n26.

Alexandria created their wealth on the basis of industry. With respect to Marx, Pöhlmann noted that 'when Marx, in his manner, formulated it as a general law that 'the accumulation of assets, on the one hand, have simultaneously created the accumulation of poverty, on the other hand, then Rome in particular - and the ancient metropolis in general - offers a dramatic proof for such a fatal concurrence of extremes.'<sup>291</sup> Pöhlmann, in this context, does characterise the Roman economy as a 'proletarian alms economy'. By elaborating on observations of this kind, Pöhlmann drew clear parallels between poor housing, public health and the nature of work of ancient Rome and the modern capitalist cities of his days.<sup>292</sup> Pöhlmann and Marx may have had the common perception that social inequalities will not continue to leave the existence of the state unaffected, and that overcrowding and a one-sided private accumulation of collectively produced surplus is likely to lead to radical social unrest and change. However, their political stance and historiographical method differed considerably. Whilst Marx would have preferred to have witnessed the end of capitalism and the emergence of a society which is more adequate to people's needs, Pöhlmann, on the other hand, saw the aristocratic order and its conservative civic values under threat from industrial urbanisation. With regard to Marxist historiography, we only need to look into his paper '*Ranke's Weltgeschichte*' to discover his programmatic opposition to any new method in historiography. 'And, what should one say about the modern interpretation of the "meaning" of history. For example, the evolutionary theory of Marxism, for which social class struggle is the "essence" of history. Or this pan-economics, which regards the history of mankind as a struggle either for the "food distribution" or for the "food-supply". Or the "philosophy of technology", which made the baffling discovery that "the whole of human history pervades itself in the invention of ever better tools".'<sup>293</sup> Whether the summaries of contemporary theories are too simplistic and wrong is not be our concern. It is only important to note that this essay demonstrates that Pöhlmann distanced himself from viewing materialism and positivism as acceptable historiography methods and in turn expressed his admiration for Ranke's achievements.<sup>294</sup> In his essay 'A World History on a Geographical Basis', Pöhlmann blames his contemporary pan-economic worldview for stripping history of everything non-productive and non-quantifiable.<sup>295</sup> However, if we compare Pöhlmann's aversion against

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<sup>291</sup> Pöhlmann (1884) p. 50.

<sup>292</sup> See Kohns (1961) p. 140 f.

<sup>293</sup> Pöhlmann (1911) p. 279.

<sup>294</sup> Pöhlmann (1911) p. 291, 299.

<sup>295</sup> See Pöhlmann (1911) p. 320.

materialism and positivism with his main works on ancient history, a certain terminological and methodological proximity to new historiographical approaches is hard to deny, which reflects badly on his theoretical rigour and consistency.

The title of Pöhlmann's main work, 'The history of the Social Question and of Socialism in the Ancient World', which emerged out of a similarly entitled study, 'The History of Ancient Socialism and Communism'<sup>296</sup>, during his professorship at Erlangen, still causes amusement and ironic comments amongst contemporary scholars, but perhaps for the wrong reasons.

The central purpose of the 'Social Question' (*Soziale Frage*) was Pöhlmann's claim that 'the ancient world was moved by the same existential questions,...which are still partially unsolved and tend to bother every honest man. The view of the traditional guild [of historians], which more or less believes it is entitled to afford to ignore the great social and cultural questions,...disparages the value which antiquity could bear for the present. For if we are unable to develop our science of antiquity into a science about the ancient folklore in ALL its aspects of life, than we shall never be able to bring antiquity closer to ourselves and to others.'<sup>297</sup> It is not clear to whom Pöhlmann refers as the 'traditional guild', but if it is Gibbon or Niebuhr, his criticism is not justified. It also becomes apparent that Pöhlmann's attempt to grasp all aspects of ancient folklore puts him rather closer to Lamprecht's goals than to Ranke's idealistic *Universalgeschichte*, which invites one to question whether Pöhlmann has truly understood Ranke.

Officially, Pöhlmann rejected any attempt to modernise antiquity or to use it for political ends seeing it as jeopardising the complexity of the past in favour of inaccurate and over-simple generalisations befitting a particular ideology and claiming that 'such schematic classifications are only designed to fool the ordinary mind.'<sup>298</sup> It seems that Pöhlmann repudiates the above mentioned reductivist accounts of history, such as materialism and, secondly, wants to demolish the myth of a 'sentimental idyllic' and harmonious form of socialism or communism in antiquity - a view which had hardly any support.<sup>299</sup>

<sup>296</sup> See Pöhlmann *Soziale Frage*, Pöhlmann (1893/1901).

<sup>297</sup> *Soziale Frage* I p. 6.

<sup>298</sup> *Soziale Frage* I p. 9.

<sup>299</sup> Salvioli in Kautsky (1909) and Salin (1923) or the Renaissance idealisation of antiquity. See Schweikhart (1996). A good example is also Pöhlmann review of Riedler's paper 'The importance of technology in Past and Future.' In Pöhlmann (1911) p. 392. Against a romanticised 'ancient socialism and communism' see also his article 'The Romantic Element in Communism and socialism of the Greeks' (1893).

However, Pöhlmann's declared proximity to political economy, especially to Roscher and the application of modern concepts such as 'proletariat' and 'class struggle', raises the question of what exactly troubles him about materialism. Pöhlmann declares, for example that the patriarchal property rights in 7<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> century Greece were already posing a social question.<sup>300</sup> He maintains that it was not harmony, but class struggle that dominated these centuries, which evolved into 'the history of the proletarian movement in the Hellenic world.'<sup>301</sup> One cannot deny that Pöhlmann intended to paint a very complex picture of the social and economic changes during the Homeric period. His conclusion however that this 'social question' resulted in a 'universal hegemony of money'<sup>302</sup> and an increase in the *pleonexie* as a 'necessary companion of the capitalistic national economy'<sup>303</sup>, shows not only an indiscriminate use of modern terminology but presupposes the existence of nation states, capitalism, industry and an established money economy. It seems that the only difference noted between ancient and modern capitalism is in its scope. The former operated primarily at 'national' level, the latter operates globally. When Christ in his biographical sketch maintains that 'Pöhlmann's definition of Roman capitalism...is still valid',<sup>304</sup> one may wonder whether the use of the term is at all adequate, and whether the Pöhlmann description of an ever deepening antagonism between the moral ideals of freedom and equality for all citizens and the injustice and poverty of social reality has a factual historical basis. The parallels between antiquity and present, between ancient and modern capitalism are for Pöhlmann somehow inevitable wherever and whenever a social question arises. 'The social question had to appear as the result of the inner development of the Hellenic *polis* as in the modern state.'<sup>305</sup> The emergence of such a social question, is however, equally ingrained into every political structure since it represents the logical disjunction between political and ethical ideas and the social and material reality, which however takes its own peculiar forms.<sup>306</sup>

In order to attain a holistic and more realistic picture of the ancient world as it was Pöhlmann's agenda not only appreciates and praises the cultural achievements, but also seeks to destroy the ill-founded myth of continuous prosperity, harmony and social camaraderie amongst the ancient citizens and to bring to light hardship, injustice and

<sup>300</sup> *Soziale Frage* I. p. 29 ff.

<sup>301</sup> *Soziale Frage*. I p. 156.

<sup>302</sup> *Soziale Frage*. I p. 189.

<sup>303</sup> *Soziale Frage*. I p. 193.

<sup>304</sup> Christ (1972) p. 208.

<sup>305</sup> *Soziale Frage*. I p. 234.

<sup>306</sup> A good example for the diversity of the social reality in modern and ancient Europe is Pöhlmann's paper

brutality too. For Pöhlmann, the greatness and cultural richness of antiquity, its remaining legacy and fascinating place in human history were bought at a high price, that of the exploitation and suppression of enslaved outsiders and the pauperised working classes.

Pöhlmann's 'pick and mix' philosophy with regard to his attempt to comprehend the achievements and disasters of the ancient world are also reflected in his interpretation and evaluation of Greek philosophy. According to Pöhlmann, the works of Plato and Aristotle are to be taken as indirect reactions to important social, 'economic' and ethical debates during the classical period. 'The principal debate between individualism and socialism in the 4th century BC, fought the fight for us and serves us as an example as in which situation we find ourselves now.'<sup>307</sup>

Besides his intentions to warn his audience about the dangers of socialist collectivism and capitalist individualism, Pöhlmann must have adapted a whole set of modern presuppositions which he applied uncritically to the political writings of Plato and Aristotle. Even if both dealt with issues such as the justification of private property, the function of money and exchange and the proper role of government and constitutions, it does not follow from this that the modern political sciences in particular economics have their roots in ancient Greek philosophy and political practice.<sup>308</sup>

In examining Pöhlmann's efforts to show how Plato's collectivism was bound to fail since it subsumed individuality, it becomes clear that Pöhlmann saw himself in the tradition of Kantian idealism, rejecting the elitist prejudice common to the Prussian School that the 'ordinary man' is incapable of practical reasoning. This applies as well to the presupposition of the established historical scholarship that man is simply a herd-animal, who requires the historian or philosopher to be his 'god authorised' shepherd. In accordance with Kant, 'consciousness, will and reason' are capable of autonomy and human beings should be conceived as having such an essential potential. Thought and reason should not be suppressed, but encouraged to flourish freely in order to attain the realm of positive freedom and morality.<sup>309</sup>

Pöhlmann's connection with the spirit of the enlightenment is perhaps most apparent in a chapter entitled 'The Hellenic polis and the freedom of the spiritual life' of his *Griechische Geschichte*.<sup>310</sup> Pöhlmann believed that during the Hellenic period 'the

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'The housing Shortage in the Ancient Cities'. See Pöhlmann (1911) p. 293 ff.

<sup>307</sup> Quoted from Christ (1972) p. 220.

<sup>308</sup> See Meikle (1989) and in more detail (1995b)

<sup>309</sup> *Soziale Frage*. II p. 236.

<sup>310</sup> See Pöhlmann (1914).

idea of civil liberties and equality of all [citizens]’ found their first realisation in the social reality<sup>311</sup> and he referred to the Greeks of the time as the ‘most spirited of all peoples.’<sup>312</sup> Whilst the ‘slavery question’ remained almost untouched, Pöhlmann idealised the late 5<sup>th</sup> and early 4<sup>th</sup> century as the age of the ‘liberation of men by the Greeks.’<sup>313</sup> Pöhlmann, in his veneration of this so called ‘enlightenment age’ of antiquity, argued that Hellas aimed to distance itself from any kind of mysticism and superstition. Worship of that kind only enslaves the human spirit according to Pöhlmann and should be replaced by faith in reason. The idealisation of human reasoning, and Pöhlmann’s failure to define it more concisely, could however also be interpreted as being nothing more than an idealistic dream, which he, like many of his contemporaries, did read into the Hellenic period.

We pointed out that the decline of the Roman Empire and the political constitutions of ancient Greece became a kind of ‘arsenal for conservatives and democrats, liberals and socialists.’<sup>314</sup> Although it is perhaps a little exaggerated to claim that the debates around ancient Greek history were a ‘seismograph’ for the much disputed social and national question in Germany, Pöhlmann’s rejection of the idea of the modern democracy goes hand in glove with his claim that, due to the Athenian democratic order, the masses were abused as the ‘substrate of the technicians of mass leadership.’<sup>315</sup> The demagogic temptations of Plato and Isocrates are rejected along with those of his democratic and socialist contemporaries of the likes of the English historian, George Grote and the German Marxist revisionist, Karl Kautsky. Democracy and socialism are the most deadly poisons for the flourishing of the ‘cultured and free individual’, even if the latter’s numbers is small and their privileges are greater than those of the masses.

Since for Pöhlmann the utopian ideals of ancient collectivism, ‘socialism and communism’ combined with pauperism are largely responsible for the demise of antiquity, the darkest force is identified in the shape of materialism and Marxism. Pöhlmann attacked in particular Karl Kautsky, as one of the leading intellectual figureheads of Marxism, for holding an evolutionary theory of economic development, which ends with the inevitable socialist revolution.<sup>316</sup> Kautsky was indeed the main initiator of the ‘revisionist movement’, which sought to reinterpret Marx as an

<sup>311</sup> Pöhlmann (1914) p. 98.

<sup>312</sup> Pöhlmann (1914) p. 101.

<sup>313</sup> Pöhlmann (1914) p. 123 f., p. 135.

<sup>314</sup> Christ (1986) p. 311. See also Funke (1998) p. 15 f.

<sup>315</sup> Pöhlmann in Christ (1972) p. 235 n128.

evolutionary economist for whom the antagonism between the proletarian productive forces and the capitalist ownership of the means of production would necessarily resolve itself in socialism.<sup>317</sup>

The downfall of Hellas exemplifies for Pöhlmann the short-comings of the democratic executive powers, which were governed by political amateurs who were incapable of 'attaining a political culture, which was ready to reject the illusion that democracy is identical with freedom.'<sup>318</sup> And further, 'here we face everywhere the corroding and destroying power of the "poison of the tongue of the enticing seducers" into which, as Euripides phrased it, the "arrows of isotropy are dipped in", which the proletarian greed has pointed at the property owners'.<sup>319</sup> Reasoning has no longer any effect upon the demagogically seduced masses, Pöhlmann lamented. When we consider Pöhlmann's rejection of democratic ideas as the 'brutal overpowering of minorities by the majority'<sup>320</sup> or the 'emancipation of the juggernauts of the mere number'<sup>321</sup>, the idealisation of pure practical reasoning as the realm of freedom and his programmatic doctrine that we can 'only study and understand our human existence through a study, which equally considers the past as well as the present'<sup>322</sup>, then it is clear that Pöhlmann committed the same fallacy of which he accused Grote and Kautsky; a point which was overlooked by Christ. However, Funke was of the opinion that such a fallacy 'should not to be judged negatively'.<sup>323</sup>

It cannot be denied that Pöhlmann deliberately used the example of the ancient world as a weapon against the modern democratic and socialist dream. However, it sounds astonishing when we hear his glorifying remarks about the Hohenzollern monarchy as personifying a liberal and lawful attitude, with its protection of minorities and the idealisation of the class of the highly educated and property owning class, as the 'natural born envoy of individual liberty'.<sup>324</sup> By doing so, Pöhlmann abuses antiquity in exactly the same fashion as his political enemies and it is surprising that none of our contemporary historians have identified this problem.

<sup>316</sup> Pöhlmann (1911) p. 394.

<sup>317</sup> See Kautsky (1912) See also Kautsky's notion essays on communism in antiquity, the middle ages and the reformation period in Germany in Kautsky (1909).

<sup>318</sup> Pöhlmann (1914) p. 223.

<sup>319</sup> Pöhlmann (1913) p. 52.

<sup>320</sup> Pöhlmann in Christ (1972) p. 236 n132.

<sup>321</sup> Pöhlmann in Christ (1972) p. 236 n133.

<sup>322</sup> Pöhlmann in Christ (1972) p. 235 n129.

<sup>323</sup> Funke (1998) p. 19.

<sup>324</sup> See Pöhlmann's essay 'Classical Antiquity in its importance for the political education of the modern citizen' in Pöhlmann (1911) pp. 1-33. Especially. p. 9 f.

One may however not forget that Pöhlmann's age, the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century, was filled with apocalyptic predictions, which in the light of rapid industrialisation and urbanisation accompanied by political and economic crises and instability, must have contributed to his deep worry that history would repeat itself. We know that the modern Europe during the later part of Pöhlmann's life faced existential questions which must 'bother every honest man'.<sup>325</sup> However, that these questions can or should be equated to the problems that faced the classical Greece and Rome does not follow from this. The idea of the recurrence of human history or a cyclic development and demise of cultures was a very popular view amongst historians and philosophers, and therefore invited the formulation of historic parallels between particular periods of the Greek and Roman culture with modern Europe.<sup>326</sup> Like his younger colleague, Eduard Meyer, Pöhlmann remarked regretfully that 'it is a sad, hopeless circle in which the history of European Hellenism is placed under the aspect of the new monarchies.'<sup>327</sup> This is again an example of Pöhlmann presupposing the existence of a set of basic and unchanging principles or natures in the dynamics between state, society and its citizens, which remain insufficiently discussed by Pöhlmann and also by Meyer.

Pöhlmann's intention to give a holistic account of the history of the social question of ancient Greece and Rome was heavily criticised by Mattias Gelzer, who wrote a rather one-sided review of Pöhlmann '*Geschichte des Antiken Sozialismus und Kommunismus*'.<sup>328</sup> It must be symptomatic for the historiography of ancient history in Germany, that Gelzer disputed only Pöhlmann's selection of the historical sources, but did not question the frequent modernising approach to ancient history between the social problems of the modern industrial cities and the pauperism of the Roman Metropolis, which was primarily an agrarian area.

Although Pöhlmann employed a good deal of materialist terminology and owes, as we have seen, parts of his award winning postdoctoral thesis on 'Overpopulation' to Marx<sup>329</sup>, he ended his '*Geschichte der Sozialen Frage*' which was certainly not in Marx's spirit with the bitter outburst, '... "create yourself a new order and you will experience

<sup>325</sup> *Soziale Frage* I p. 6.

<sup>326</sup> Speculations of this sort are found amongst many prominent historians such as Eduard Meyer, Oswald Spengler and Max Weber. The often asserted 'modernisation' of antiquity should however not be treated as a sign of an inevitable course of human history, but as a general concern nevertheless. Every event or personality in history has of course its own identity and peculiarities. The question is however, how similar or analogue historic events can be to justify the formulation of an analogy?

<sup>327</sup> Pöhlmann (1914) p. 323.

<sup>328</sup> See Gelzer (1914) p. 102 ff.

<sup>329</sup> See Pöhlmann (1884).

miracles', this is the inheritance which ancient socialism left all later [socialisms]...It is the same belief...through which the communist kingdom of God on earth became a cruel reality. The same belief...which is in numerous human hearts still very much alive today as it was in the Roman Empire, the hope of the Christians for the 'kingdom of God' - the greatest mass-delusion of world history.'<sup>330</sup> Such bitter remarks do not improve Pöhlmann's credibility in the wider context of the Bücher-Meyer Controversy. However, Pöhlmann's work highlights a number of interesting aspects, which should perhaps be considered to have contributed to the controversy.

Firstly, Pöhlmann sought to establish a closer link between *Alttertumswissenschaft* and *Nationalökonomie* than any of his predecessors and contemporaries. As a political ancient historian he continuously highlighted the value of ancient social and political history for the education of the young German citizen Pöhlmann's analysis of the antagonisms, which necessarily emerge in the relationship between the social reality and political superstructure seem to point towards the methodology of the political theorists Marx, Gneist and Stein.<sup>331</sup> All three of these authors inquired into the concepts and the relationship of society, state, law and their history. Pöhlmann therefore did not reject a 'socio-economical' and political historiographical method, which Meyer rejected wholeheartedly. But even Pöhlmann's only methodological paper 'The Method of Ancient History' does not discuss the problem of value connection in the formulation of historical judgements. Even if Pöhlmann was the first ancient historian who discovered the importance of political economy and economic history for the study of ancient history, his attempts to use certain events of antiquity in order to debate modern political and economic problems remain highly problematic.

One can certainly call Pöhlmann's position original since it somehow tries to unite what many of his contemporaries would see as impossible to unite. It is therefore not surprising that Pöhlmann had no direct followers, but his mixture of conservative values, the admiration for Ranke and Niebuhr and the belief in some sort of dynamics between individual decision making, society and the state does not let us categorise him as being between Bücher and Meyer. In terms of the direct comparisons between antiquity and modernity and the cyclic economic and political development combined with the a nationalistic value system, his position is undoubtedly closer to Beloch and Meyer. Since Bücher tries to avoid such a methodology including the application of modern historical

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<sup>330</sup> *Soziale Frage*. II p. 508.

<sup>331</sup> Pöhlmann (1914) p. 5 f. cited in Christ (1972) p. 227 n94.

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concepts into the ancient 'economy', it is difficult to make out any noteworthy connection between the two. However, the obituaries have shown that Pöhlmann was genuinely regarded as a well-acknowledged scholar, who perhaps deserves more attention than his work has received to date. Friedrich Oertel's 'Supplement' and Christ's biographical sketch certainly made a valuable contribution to the history of historiography, but a historiographical study is still missing which would allow us to determine more clearly what influence Pöhlmann's work had on historical and political scholarship.

## Part III - Max Weber and the Aftermath of the Bücher-Meyer Controversy

'The true tradition is not a witness of a completed past,  
it is a lively force, which stimulates and instructs the  
present...One ties up to a tradition in order to create  
something new.'

STRAVINSKY\*

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\* See Metz (1979) p. 646.

## 1. Max Weber's 'Solution' to the Controversy

### *Introduction*

In the previous two parts we aimed to show that the Bücher-Meyer Controversy was not simply a dispute between two scholars who academically, and also on a more personal level, had very little in common indeed. After having examined its background, this controversy exemplifies the respectable efforts by both scholars to understand and evaluate the cultural inheritance of antiquity and to apply its political, social and economic status as part of a theory of economic development in one way or another. The insurmountable differences in method and ideology between Bücher and Meyer, as well as the political circumstances and feuds within academia, hindered the possibility of a solution or even a compromise between the debating sides. Under the above mentioned circumstances it is difficult to see where and how such a compromise could have occurred.

Nevertheless, it has been frequently asserted that Max Weber attempted to find a solution to the bitterly fought and ideologically burdened debate by attempting to bridge the epistemological gap between historicism and the methodologies of the empirical social and psycho-analytical sciences. Chapter one of this final part will argue against this misconception. Instead, we aim to establish that Weber did not simply introduce a blended version of opposing views in economic history, but that he opened a new chapter in historiographical methodology and that he made substantial progress in the field of ancient economic history in general. However, we aim to highlight the claim that Weber did not make a 'fresh start' with his analysis of the ancient economy, but that he built upon Bücher's and Meyer's theories.<sup>1</sup>

Chapter two will focus on Weber's influence over later generations of ancient and economic historians. After Weber mainly Johannes Hasebroek and Michael I. Rostovtzeff continued the debate over the nature of the ancient economy. Other contributors such as Laum, Rosenberg and Oertel will be briefly considered and examined in the context of the Bücher-Meyer controversy.<sup>2</sup> We aim to show that the ideological and methodological divisions amongst philosophers, historians and political economists can deliver a complex

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<sup>1</sup> Cf Austin and Vidal-Naquet (1977) p. 3.

<sup>2</sup> For a good introduction into the connection of Weber and the Bücher-Meyer Controversy see Christ (1981) pp. 102-116.

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explanation as to why the question over the nature of the ancient economy is still pending a solution, and why this exciting debate seems to have become less popular in recent years.

*i. Biographical Note*<sup>3</sup>

Max Weber was born in 1864 in Erfurt, the eldest son of seven children the son of a successful nation-liberal politician, Dr Max Weber, who was first a city councillor in Berlin and Erfurt and later became a member of the Prussian House of Deputies and of the German Reichstag. Max Weber's father's commitment to the German National Liberal ideology, which was largely at peace with Bismarck's nationalist and reformist aims, this would influence the younger Weber significantly.<sup>4</sup> The young Weber grew up in what could be called a cultured bourgeois household. Leading academics and politicians were frequent guests at the Weber home. Here Weber met well known historians of the Prussian School, such as Sybel and Treitschke, but also the highly recognised Roman historian, Theodor Mommsen as well as the philosopher, Wilhelm Dilthey.

With only short interruptions due to his military service, Weber studied law in Jena, Heidelberg and Berlin between 1882-1885. During his period of study he was taught and influenced by the economist Karl Knies, the ancient historian and expert in Roman law, Immanuel Becker, studied medieval and German history with Bernhard Erdmannsdoerffer and was introduced to the philosophy of the neo-Kantian philosopher, Kuno Fischer.<sup>5</sup>

In 1888 he joined the national-liberal orientated '*Verein für Sozialpolitik*' ('Association for Social Policy'). In 1889 he was awarded a *summa cum laude* for his PhD thesis and completed his post-doctoral thesis *On Roman Agrarian History (Zur Römischen Agrargeschichte)* in 1891. His '*Habilitationsschrift*' was published in 1892 and concerned the plight of the East Elbean agricultural workers ('*Die Verhältnisse der Landarbeiter im Ostelbischen Deutschland*'). Both works are not only noteworthy due to the scholarly excellence with which they were carried out and presented, but they also underline Weber's encyclopaedic and interdisciplinary abilities, which earned him a lectureship at the Humboldt University of Berlin – Prussia's leading institution for the training of first class academics and loyal state bureaucrats.<sup>6</sup>

In the previous chapters it frequently came to light that many German academics, especially those who took part or were associated with the Bücher-Meyer Controversy were eager to promote their ideas to a wider academic and semi-academic audience. In

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<sup>3</sup> Very comprehensive is Coser (1977) pp, 234-242. More detailed is Zohn (1975).

<sup>4</sup> Coser (1977) p. 234 ff.

<sup>5</sup> Coser (1977) p. 237 ff.

<sup>6</sup> Coser (1977) p. 238 f.

order to find an audience and in order to be a credible patriotic modern German scholar, intellectuals in all Humanities disciplines had to combine the highly specialised and sometimes overly detailed research findings with the burning political question of their time. As Friedrich Meinecke noted, 'at the turn of the century the number of students of...history had...everywhere sunk to a low figure, after that. However, it mounted again to such an extent that the decade prior to the first World War can rank as a golden age for historical...and philosophical study.'<sup>7</sup> Due to a dramatically increased popularity of these academic disciplines, the scholar was ever closer to the centre of public attention. It is therefore perhaps not surprising that Weber's inaugural address of 1895 on *The National State and Economic Policy*, aimed to address a topic of public interest.<sup>8</sup>

In *The National State and Economic Policy* Weber creatively combined findings from the increasingly popular field of economic and constitutional history with his own national-liberal agenda, which brought him to the attention of a wider scholarly and political audience than he had been able to reach previously with his studies in ancient and modern agrarian social history. His new recognition led to his post at Heidelberg in 1896 where he succeeded his former teacher Karl Knies as professor of political economy.<sup>9</sup> In Heidelberg, Weber not only re-established contacts with his other former teachers, Bekker, Erdmannsdoerffer and Kuno Fischer, but found new friends and colleagues, such as the legal scholar, Georg Jellinek, and the theologian, Ernst Troeltsch. Weber established himself, whilst still remarkably young, as one of Heidelberg's leading academic figures.

In 1897 Weber's promising and flourishing scholarly and semi-political career in the *Verein* came to an abrupt standstill due to a nervous breakdown from which he was not to recover for over five years. Positive signs of recovery are not notable until 1903 when he managed to join the *Archiv für Socialwissenschaft* as co-editor alongside the political economist Werner Sombart. This Journal soon became one of the leading German social science periodicals. Weber's editorial duties allowed him to re-establish old contacts to friends and academic colleagues that he had lost due to his long mental illness.<sup>10</sup>

In 1904 a former colleague and later Harvard scholar and political analyst, Hugo Muensterberg, invited Weber to present a paper to the *Congress of Arts and Sciences* in St.

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<sup>7</sup> Meinecke (1941) p. 20.

<sup>8</sup> Coser (1977) p. 238 f.

<sup>9</sup> Not professor of 'economics' as Coser (1977) p. 238 stated. It cannot be stressed enough that political economy and 'economics' are not entirely synonymous. Both subjects investigate the nature of the capitalist economy, but economics assumes a predominance of economic institutions, which shape and govern politics. Most political economists still acknowledged at the turn of the century the essential importance of the State as the legislator and guardian of the national interest.

Louis. The lecture was about the social structure of Germany and was the first he had given for six and a half years. In his graduate studies Weber developed an increasing interest in the links between Protestantism and the growth and fostering of capitalism by the American bureaucracy. His later work on *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* benefited from those frequent journeys and studies.<sup>11</sup>

Weber's return to his chair at Heidelberg in the winter 1905 marked a new era in his scholarly career. Not only did he publish one of his most original works, *The Protestant Ethic*, but in the same year he also became one of the founding members of the '*Deutsche Soziologische Gesellschaft*' alongside the political theorist, Ferdinand Toennies and the social philosopher, George Simmel.

The years before the First World War were probably the most active and creative in Weber's academic career. He started to rebuild old friendships and made new acquaintances that enriched his work. During these years his working environment at his home in Heidelberg can probably be described as vibrant and fruitful. His home and academic environment can be regarded as one of the more liberal-orientated centres for stimulating and richly varying intellectual exchanges and popular-scientific gatherings. Amongst the many scholars old and young are familiar names, such as Troeltsch, Simmel, and Sombart, as well as the neo-Kantian philosophers, Wilhelm Windelband, Heinrich Rickert and Emil Lask, the literary critic and historian Friedrich Gundolf, and the intellectual historian Karl Jaspers.<sup>12</sup> Young radical Marxist philosophers like Ernst Bloch and Georg Lukàcs were to join the circle shortly before the war.<sup>13</sup>

After Weber's initial support for the World War, which he shared with most German intellectuals and politicians, his enthusiasm faded and turned eventually into disillusionment and anger. Much of his time was taken up with attempting to influence the German government not to drag America into the war as he prophesied a gloomy outcome for Germany's imperialistic endeavour. Though Weber was not a principled enemy of the

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<sup>10</sup> Coser (1977) p. 240 f.

<sup>11</sup> See Honningsheim (1950).

<sup>12</sup> One only needs to read the collection of appreciation and obituaries by these scholars put together by König (1985) to realise how the intellect, academic achievements and the moral determination of Weber was echoed positively from left to right within and outside academia. This work is also useful in respect of the political and ideological reflections of those scholars over their time. Contributors amongst others are Heinrich Rickert, Max Rehm, Ernst Bloch, Lujo Brentano, Theodor Heuss, Joseph Schumpeter and Friedrich Meinecke.

<sup>13</sup> One of the younger members of the circle, Paul Honningsheim, published a work about this vibrant pre-war intellectual climate surrounding Weber. See Honningsheim (1947).

war, he rejected the overly imperialistic ambitious and doomed cause of the aristocratic Junker forces of the 'Right'.

When Karl Liebknecht in the 'January Rising' of 1919 declared the Socialist Republic in Berlin, Weber was appalled about what was in his eyes no more than a bloody carnival. But he soon rallied to it and attempted to develop the basis for a liberal German policy. The end of the war saw Weber returning to his academic work. With the beginning of the summer semester in spring 1918 Weber moved to Vienna; a year later he accepted a call to the Ludwig Maximilian's University of Munich. His well-known lectures, 'Science as a Vocation' (*Wissenschaft als Beruf*) and 'Politics as a Vocation', were first delivered to an audience of students at Munich in 1919, and bear all the marks of his attempt to define his national-democratic political and intellectual orientation and to highlight the importance of scientific impartiality in this stormy period of revolutionary upheaval.<sup>14</sup> During this period, and in the immediate post-war years, Weber also worked on his main work, 'Economy and Society' (*Wirtschaft und Gesellschaft*). Although he was not able to complete this work, what he finished was published posthumously, as were his last series of lectures at Munich, which were to have been the basis for a General Economic History.

Max Weber died aged only fifty-six in Munich 1920. Although Weber's scholarly influence over many disciplines in the human sciences, and across national boundaries after his death continues to be vast, during his lifetime he never reached the scholarly prominence of an Eduard Meyer or Theodor Mommsen, but that was perhaps never his ambition. His main achievements lie in his philosophy of science and its applications into sociology, social history and the history of political economy, which is why his name appears in almost all commentaries on the Bücher-Meyer Controversy. Alexander Demandt and Jürgen Mommsen are currently in charge of editing Weber's bequest into *the Max Weber Gesamtausgabe*.

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<sup>14</sup> Coser (1977) p. 242.

*ii. Weber and the 'Traditional' Reading of the Ancient Economy*

Weber's view of the nature of ancient economy has often been mistakenly interpreted as constituting a kind of middle position between Bücher and Meyer.<sup>15</sup> Hand in hand with this illusive simplification comes the suggestion that one could simply disconnect Weber's interpretation of the ancient economy from his intellectual background and the traditional reading of the ancient economy in the German historiography. Alfred Heuss once pointed out that 'when it is not the sociology of religion in Max Weber, which has importance for antiquity [the study of antiquity], then, the conjecture is close, that antiquity was picked up by him in its plain 'historicity'. That is to say, in the broadness of its phenomena and not, right from the start, under the abstraction of a single peculiar aspect.'<sup>16</sup> Heuss pointed out that Weber's approach towards the subject was strongly influenced by the emphasis of the dominant political forces in history. It is perhaps surprising that Weber advanced so considerably far into the social and economic world of ancient Greece and Rome, as he was not a professionally trained historian. However, interest in this subject was second nature to almost any scholar in the human sciences who attempted to base themselves seriously in the German academic world and who reached some kind of prominence. As for Bücher and Meyer, Weber's interest into antiquity as a whole derived quite probably from its politically recognised importance as one of the most indispensable key elements in the German education system. It was also a powerful and pervasive element of the German *Gymnasia* and university curricula system which, since Niebuhr and Ranke, had placed an emphasis on ancient political history and classical philology. We also noted earlier in Part II that *Alttertumswissenschaft* experienced a considerable turn towards realism towards the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. By this we mean a turn towards a more practical reading of ancient history and its classical authors in order to rear and prepare the young and modern German citizens for the patriotic cause of an ambitious new-born German nation in the hands of the Prussian aristocracy and their entrepreneur companions. Historical realities and national struggles headed by grandiose personalities became the focal point of the historical inquiry and accompanied a move away from pure 'humanistic values' with an emphasis on textual, rhetoric and drama.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> Deininger (1990) p. 144.

<sup>16</sup> Heuss (1965) p. 537.

<sup>17</sup> See Heuss (1965) p. 532 f.

Eduard Meyer and Karl Julius Beloch, who dominated ancient Greek history in the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century, became well known during Weber's years at the University of Heidelberg. Wilamowitz-Möllendorf, Wilcken and the great Theodor Mommsen had already reached the hall of fame of ancient Greek and Roman history. Their impact on the subject has already been briefly sketched out in the previous part and is well-documented.<sup>18</sup>

Another contemporary of Weber was Ulrich Mitteis, lecturer in ancient history and law at Heidelberg.<sup>19</sup> Mitteis fostered and significantly influenced Weber's interest in ancient law and history. Evidence of Weber's first steps in legal and economic history came to light with the publication of an article on medieval trade-law and trade organisations.<sup>20</sup> This work formed the basis for his post-doctoral thesis on Roman agrarian history two years later.<sup>21</sup> The *Agrargeschichte* of 1891 carried, of course, the influence of his supervisor, August Meitzen (1822-1910),<sup>22</sup> from whom Weber learnt the practical concept of the importance of 'fundamental types' of agrarian constitution (*'Grundtypen der Agrarverfassung'*).<sup>23</sup> Weber was yet to reflect on the methodological implications of introducing and defining such types, but they already play an important part during his early work.

For the purpose of this thesis it is of course necessary to outline all possible scholarly influences on Weber's interpretation of the ancient world. However, in order to indicate where Weber should be seen in the Bücher-Meyer Controversy and to what extent, if at all, he has developed the arguments any further, it would be useful to contrast Weber's 'ancient economy' and his philosophy of history with that of Eduard Meyer. It is perhaps here that we can seek clarification about Weber's idealistic roots and the considerable differences in the German classical scholarship of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, of which Meyer was clearly a well-known representative and advocate.<sup>24</sup>

It should be pointed out that Weber never actually intended to enter the debate between Bücher and Meyer directly. Weber makes explicit mentioning of both scholars with regard to the context of the Controversy only very sporadically and is rarely assertive. The exception was Meyer's philosophy of history, which Weber scrutinised a systematically, but without attempting to question Meyer's achievements as one of the

<sup>18</sup> On Mommsen see Hartmann (1908) and Wickert (1980). On Wilken and Willamowitz see Christ (1996).

<sup>19</sup> On Mitteis see Weiss (1922).

<sup>20</sup> See Weber (1889).

<sup>21</sup> See Weber (1891) in *MWG* vol. I/2 (1986).

<sup>22</sup> See Meitzen (1895).

<sup>23</sup> See Deiniger in *MWG I/2* (1996) p. 17 f., 19 n25.

most prominent ancient historians.<sup>25</sup> Meyer's response and critical analysis of Weber's works is more fragmented and occasional than vice versa. Overall it seemed that Meyer was primarily pleased about Weber's critical comments regarding the scientific defects in the validity of Rodbertus' 'oikos' theory, which almost sums up Meyer's relationship to the legal and agrarian historian from Heidelberg.<sup>26</sup>

If one does not wish to presume that Meyer nourished scholarly prejudice against Weber due to lack of formal ancient historical and classical training of the latter, it must be surprising that although both were actively seeking universally substantiated *Weltanschauung*, Weber's work in the field of social and economic history left Meyer largely untouched.<sup>27</sup> In return Weber dedicated a substantial part of his writings in ancient 'economics' to the analysis of Meyer's works from his history of ancient Greece to his work on ancient Judaism and the ancient Orient.

The first considerable work by Weber showing the influence of Meyer was *Die Römische Agrargeschichte* of 1891. The thesis aimed to understand the 'economic' implications of ownership in ancient Rome. By doing so it elucidates Weber's interest in the ancient economy and in the development of theoretical political economy as a not merely historical discipline. This clearly marked an effort by Weber to move away from traditional and historical schools of economic analysis. Weber's work shows throughout a continuous reference to Meyer's work in ancient history. Most notable is Weber's paper on the social decline of the ancient culture of 1897, which can be regarded as a reply to Meyer's *WEdA* of (1895) and the critical analysis of Meyer's philosophy of history in 1906 as a reply to Meyer's *THEORIE*.<sup>28</sup> Also worth mentioning are the laudatory remarks concerning Meyer's work throughout the three editions of Weber's *Agrarverhältnisse im Altertum* and at frequent points in his main work, *Wirtschaft und Gesellschaft*.<sup>29</sup>

<sup>24</sup> The relationship between the two scholars has recently been sketched out in an article by Jürgen Deininger, which provided the basis framework for this subchapter. See Deininger in Calder III (1990) pp. 132-158.

<sup>25</sup> See 'Kritische Studien zur Kulturwissenschaftlichen Logik' 1. Zur Auseinandersetzung mit Eduard Meyer' in Weber *GAW* pp. 215-266.

<sup>26</sup> *WEdA* p. 83 n1. Weber was particularly critical towards the application of Rodbertus' 'oikos' theorem over the entire character of the ancient economy. Weber like Meyer, postulated the return of this feature as re-emerging at the end of antiquity. See Deininger (1990) p. 139. A previous comment in Meyer's *GdA* vol. II p. 581 was only critical and polemic when Meyer sneered that Weber's lack of historical critique with regard to the age of the *ager publicus* 'is common custom amongst jurisprudence scholarship' cit. In Deininger (1990) p. 135. Worth noting though is here that one should not equate Rodbertus with Bücher's *oikos* theory. However, it can be argued that Meyer probably judged a scientific attack on Rodbertus as an indirect strike against Bücher's theory of the 'geschlossene Hauswirtschaft'.

<sup>27</sup> *GdA* vol. 1.2.i. p. ix.

<sup>28</sup> See Weber's *Gründe* and Weber (1951) pp. 215-290.

<sup>29</sup> *WG* pp. 5, 787 and 816.

Even though Weber does not quote Meyer in his paper, *Gründe*, some parallels between the authors do emerge; likewise with Bücher, which indeed could create the impression of Weber holding a middle position between the two. Weber's influential paper characterises the ancient culture and its economy as a 'city, slave and coast culture'.<sup>30</sup> Two assumptions are clearly shared by Weber and Meyer. First of all, Weber also assumes that the decline of the Roman Empire was not due to a sudden collapse of its power structure, but was a rather gradual process at which end 'stood the recovery of the family at the lower layers of society' and 'the restoration of the farming classes'.<sup>31</sup> Meyer makes a similar point. Secondly, both seem to share the same view regarding the negative effects of the ongoing cultural and moral decay of antiquity. The '*Kulturverfall*' and the decaying ethical standards are for Weber symptomatic and not the sole cause of the downfall of the ancient culture. One of the contradictions which emerged from the nature of the ancient culture is situated in the dichotomy between free labour in the cities and large scale enslavement on Roman farms that led eventually to a shift in the balance of power between the two. It is also interesting that Weber avoids using the term *Wirtschaft* out with the context of culture. It seems that throughout this paper, which should become fundamental to his later writings on this subject, the economy is always an aspect of a culture, but not dominant. We will return to this point below. Meyer seemed to have concentrated more rigorously on the political and moral downfall of antiquity, whilst Weber highlighted the cultural decay from a number of social, economic, moral reasons, but primarily military reasons.<sup>32</sup> This explains perhaps Weber's elucidation in the *Gründe* and can possibly be regarded as an implicit point of contention with Meyer.<sup>33</sup> In opposition to Weber, Meyer believed that the reason for the much-debated downfall of Rome was rather due to a process of political disintegration and moral corruption.<sup>34</sup> Almost categorically Weber maintained in opposition to some of his colleagues in ancient history that although it may be understandable if a historian can deliver '*de te narratur fabula*' to his audience, this seems to be inappropriate in the case of the decline of the Roman Empire. He maintained that 'for our current social problems we have very little or nothing to learn from the history of antiquity. A proletarian of today and an ancient slave understand each other like a European to a Chinese man. Our problems are of a

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<sup>30</sup> *Gründe* p. 201-292.

<sup>31</sup> *Gründe* p. 290.

<sup>32</sup> *Gründe* p. 291.

<sup>33</sup> See *Gründe* p. 295.

completely different kind.’<sup>35</sup> Therefore, for Weber, the decline of antiquity is only of a historical interest.<sup>36</sup> We will see whether he sticks to this premise.

It is important to note that this conclusion is not based on Bücher’s theory of economic stages, but on Weber’s own research going back as early as 1889 in which he already distanced himself from evolutionary theories that postulated the end of the ancient civilisation as part of a supersession by something more supreme – modern man.<sup>37</sup>

Although Weber does not mention any particular scholar in his paper *die Sozialen Gründe* (‘Social Causes’), it was recently suggested that the paper is a direct reaction to Meyer’s ‘famous paper’ *Die Wirtschaftliche Entwicklung des Altertums* of 1895.<sup>38</sup> However, from the tone and emphasis that Weber used, it is more likely that he criticised Pöhlmann’s and Beloch’s all too swift analogies between the social and political circumstances of allegedly similar developments in antiquity and the modern world. The article in the *Handwörterbuch* continues the analysis, which he had already started in the paper *Sozialen Gründe* and marked a significant contribution to the issues that were debated in the Bücher-Meyer Controversy.<sup>39</sup>

Since Weber assumes a cyclic cultural development, it is easy to suggest that this stems from Meyer’s influence. However, Weber argues that the peculiarities of the ancient social structure are generally responsible for its decline and he does not put the blame primarily onto greedy feudal lords and the decadent lavish immoral lifestyle of the city entrepreneurs and politicians as other political historians tend to do.<sup>40</sup>

It was recently suggested by Jürgen Deininger that Weber was in particular strongly influenced by Meyer’s analysis of the ‘inner political, social and economic development of Greek *polis*.’<sup>41</sup> However, it is difficult to assess from Deininger’s point whether Weber refers to the rich and well-researched material that Meyer revealed or whether Meyer’s evaluation of the sources influenced Weber’s views. From the reading of Weber and also from the more recent comments by Mazza, we are inclined to judge the influence of Meyer on Weber primarily on the side of the detailed classification of sources.<sup>42</sup> It is also difficult

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<sup>34</sup> Similar also Spengler (1980) On The relationship between Oswald Spengler and Max Weber see Douglas Webster ‘Max Weber and Oswald Spengler’ in Mommsen (1987) pp. 515-527.

<sup>35</sup> *Gründe* p. 291.

<sup>36</sup> *Gründe* p. 291.

<sup>37</sup> See Weber (1889).

<sup>38</sup> Christ (1988) p. 101, n33, n34. See also Deininger (1990) p. 141.

<sup>39</sup> See Weber (1897).

<sup>40</sup> This does not exclude Meyer, but as we have seen in Part I, Meyer used also such factors as significant causes for the decline of the ancient culture.

<sup>41</sup> Deininger (1990) p. 139.

<sup>42</sup> Mazza (1985) p.535

for us to assess whether Weber in the third edition of the *Agrarverhältnisse* adopted significantly more of Meyer's theory of decline of antiquity. Even if this were the case, it is by no means obvious from Deininger's comment whether Weber's finalised theory of the decline of the ancient civilisation marks a close approximation to Meyer's theory.<sup>43</sup> The critical evaluation of the sources and historic examples used by both authors is beyond the remit of this thesis. However, it should be emphasised that Weber's characterisation of the ancient economy as part of a city, slave and coastal culture is a *typus*, with which he went qualitatively beyond Meyer's political characterisations. The assumption of a culturally embedded economy, which was characterised by slavery, maritime trade and coastal urban centres was never modified into the political and individualistic historiography of Meyer even if Weber acknowledged the power of the historic personalities and the historical accident more emphatically in his later works. Meyer and Weber shared the view over the existence and significance of wage labour in the cities.<sup>44</sup> However, exaggerations of this fact by Meyer's pupil Gummerus did not meet with Weber's approval.<sup>45</sup> By doing so Weber separates himself very distinctly from those scholars who saw in every movement of commodities a sign of international trade. 'The often praised Roman roads have as little in common with modern traffic as the Roman postal system.'<sup>46</sup> However, sea trade is admitted even though it was primarily concerned with the export of luxury goods. 'Only via the sea and along big rivers exists a continuous and regular international exchange.'<sup>47</sup> Roads for Weber were primarily military installations and not trade roots. Therefore, most people would have preferred to live away from such roads due to the presence of the barracks and their soldiers, and the accompanying rodent population.

Even if Weber did attempt to deliver a very complex picture of the ancient social status and developments by characterising this economy as a city, coastal and slave economy, there is a slight suspicion that Weber fell back into a modernising way of conceptualising the ancient economy. On the one hand he argues, at least partly against Meyer and other colleagues, that the ancient world did not achieve the status of modern economy. On the other hand, he concedes to those scholars that the latter's terminology of 'factory' and 'factory worker', the existence of banking and trade can, at most, be

<sup>43</sup> Deininger (1990) p. 142.

<sup>44</sup> Although in the *Agrarverhältnisse* Weber is similarly canny with naming scholars with who he disagrees, the section on literature shows explicit disagreements with Meyer

<sup>45</sup> *Gründe* p. 290. See also Gummerus (1902) and (1906).

<sup>46</sup> *Gründe* p. 292.

<sup>47</sup> *Gründe* p. 292.

compared with the Middle Ages and the time before the 13<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>48</sup> It is not clear from this in what way the feudal economy is fundamentally different from the ancient world and whether even the term 'worker' can or should be used when drawing such a comparison. In his early works Weber does not address the problem of the historical and social concept formation, an issue which he would address in his earlier *Wirtschaft und Gesellschaft*.

We know that Weber also argued that mass slavery towards the end of antiquity stifled the level of specialisation and competition in the cities where the free labourer had lived and worked. Almost in conformity with Bücher, Weber maintained that the free craftsmanship in the cities only began to flourish in the Middle Ages. In antiquity though we can only speak of a rather thin and extensive net or layer of international trade, which occupies the surface of a deeply rooting and characteristic natural economy ('*Naturalwirtschaft*')<sup>49</sup>

Weber rejected attempts to interpret the ancient economy as essentially modern (17<sup>th</sup>, 18<sup>th</sup> century) though, and to apply modern economic terminology in a methodologically unsound manner. This criticism on method applies in some ways to Bücher too, although Bücher's argument to characterise the ancient economy (similarly to Rodbertus) as predominantly *oikos* based does not find Weber's full disagreement. It is rather the rigid application of theories of economic stages he seems to oppose. For Weber the development from antiquity to the Middle Ages was a rather gradual process, even though the standards and methods of comparing late antiquity with the 13<sup>th</sup> century was not made clear by Weber. One might wish to add that the application of theories of economic stages is also a product of the modern economic theorists and not a universally valid methodological tool, as noted in our critique on Bücher. This fundamental theoretical issue was not recognised by Weber and therefore not part of his argument.

It seems, however, that although Weber did not agree with Meyer's characterisation of the modern character of particular periods in antiquity, the former nevertheless owed much to Meyer's commonly well acknowledged excellent collection of textual sources on ancient economic life.<sup>50</sup> Meyer also influenced Spengler and Toynbee, but unlike Toynbee clearly acknowledged a difference in the political organisation of ancient Rome and modern Europe at least in his early and non-political writings.<sup>51</sup> Meyer does not dispute Weber's interpretation of the ancient economy as a slave, coastal and city economy.

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<sup>48</sup> *Gründe* p. 293.

<sup>49</sup> *Gründe* p. 294.

<sup>50</sup> Deininger (1990) p. 144.

Meyer, seemed to have gone about simply a little too light-minded for Weber's taste with the use of modern economic terms and the qualitatively similar scope of production and trade during Hellenic antiquity and early capitalism. In the *Argrarverhältnisse* we only hear that although 'Eduard Meyer aimed to summarise in particular the economic development [of antiquity]...The sharpness of his economic concepts leaves however somewhat to be desired, and for the Roman period he probably has to modify his view significantly.'<sup>52</sup> The predominance of the political decision making within the city is however disputed by neither Meyer or Weber.

Many of Weber's theses and investigations in the field of ancient economic history were not superseded by later works or criticism. Even Mario Mazza, who opposed Weber's position in many ways, pointed out that 'everything that was written about the economic situation in the ancient world, goes more or less directly back to Weber's visions.'<sup>53</sup> Weber's essay *Gründe* does not single out one factor in the decline of the ancient civilisation, but sheds light onto the whole complexity of 'economic' life in antiquity.<sup>54</sup> In conjunction with this topic, Weber uses the concept of capitalism in antiquity, but aims to distinguish it from modern capitalism. The very fact that he used such a modern concept to describe aspects of the ancient cultural world makes one suspicious that he may have been closer to the modernisers' position than he realised. On the other hand, in the *Gründe* and the *Römische Agrargeschichte* Weber emphasised strongly the self-sufficiency of the household in the rural regions as characteristic for the late period of the Roman Empire. However, the growth or rebirth of the self-sufficient *oikos* contributed as a major factor to the decline of the ancient city and thereby also to the demise of the production of commodities for exchange i.e. for commercial purposes. Weber acknowledged Rodbertus' point that a disparity existed between the 'money economy' and barter, but he had already rejected, in the *Römische Agrargeschichte* of 1891, Rodbertus' claim that the self-sufficient household was the predominant characteristic throughout the entire period of antiquity.<sup>55</sup> Weber believed that with an increase of mass-slavery the rural areas cut themselves off from the dependencies of the cities, which led to a breakdown in production and crafts in the cities that were no longer

<sup>51</sup> Cf. Toynbee (1954) p. 232.

<sup>52</sup> Weber (1897) p. 18.

<sup>53</sup> Mazzarino (1966) p. 149.

<sup>54</sup> Kneissl (1988) p. 100 n27.

<sup>55</sup> Rodbertus believed in almost direct opposition to Weber, that the breakdown of the self-sufficient *oikos* led to the downfall of ancient culture. See *MWG* 1/2 p. 317. We also hear from the 'the landless and family-less slaves even from large-scale slave farms.' *RA* p. 315f., p. 345ff. and *Gründe* p. 303.

required. The large-scale farmers and landlords gained more political weight, the city with its culture was in decline, which benefited the growth benefit of the rural areas. Again similarities to Meyer become obvious. Such a crowding-out would not only have economic effects but would result in the decline of the 'slave', 'city' and 'coast culture', which according to Weber used to dominate antiquity. Weber stated that the state economy, which had already developed a sophisticated use of money as a medium of exchange faced the problem of coping with a considerable shift towards barter.<sup>56</sup> In the *Römische Agrargeschichte* Weber assigned trade an important role in the early Roman Empire, but this aspect was in decline during its downfall.<sup>57</sup> However, Weber's view is essentially different from Meyer's. He argues against Meyer by claiming that trade between the ancient coastal cities may have included a large number of objects, however, trade was at the same time quantitatively insignificant. Only a 'small number of the possessing class' benefited from it.<sup>58</sup> Other important factors contributing to the decline of the Roman Empire were the concentration of forced labour in large labour camps due to the 'international' transport over the Mediterranean. In order to explain the decline of the ancient city, Weber returned again to the contradiction between urban coast culture and rural inland culture.<sup>59</sup> The vast numbers of slaves in the late stages of the Empire settled again in rural area and returned to the farmers' life which was still familiar to them, since most of these humans were captured and taken away from villages and small settlements.<sup>60</sup> For Weber, it was the inability of the Roman conquest to accustom its urban culture to the increasingly rural character of its northern territories and to adapt the highly bureaucratized system of government.<sup>61</sup> We can perhaps infer from this that Weber's agrarian capitalism coincides with a system of imperialistic goals, where large-scale trade was state administered and bureaucracy worked on a low level of rationalisation. In the *Römische Agrarverhältnisse* as well as in the *Sozialen Gründe*, Weber seems to use a concept of capitalism, but is denying its industrial character. The agrarian forms do dominate the economic life of antiquity. The formulation of the agrarian laws, which aimed to resolve the accumulating problems between claims of ownership of landed property, contributed to a higher level of economic rationalisation. This was the sole purpose of the *lex agora* of

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<sup>56</sup> See Kneissl (1988) p. 108 n63-n67

<sup>57</sup> *MWG* 1 /2 p. 101, 216f., 239, 241 n53

<sup>58</sup> Kneissl (1988) p. 109 and *Gründe* p. 294f, 298f.

<sup>59</sup> Weber (1988) p. 344 f. The increase in rural settlements is used by Weber to elucidate the emergence of the Medieval rural centres.

<sup>60</sup> See also *GVAN* p. 10 n31.

<sup>61</sup> See Deininger in Kneissl (1988) p. 112f.

111 BC.<sup>62</sup> Weber points out that these laws did not resolve all arising conflict. In fact it was quite the opposite, speculation with landed property continued and was only prevented for a short period of time.<sup>63</sup> According to Weber, the full effect of all this was a kind of agrarian ancient capitalism on a large scale of development. Jürgen Deininger pointed out recently that although Weber tried to distinguish ancient and modern capitalism, the reproach remains that he was a moderniser by using the term at all and this despite Weber's conceptualisation of the ancient economy as a coast, slave and city culture in the *Gründe*.<sup>64</sup> This creates a dilemma; if the ancient economy was indeed fundamentally different from the modern economy, is the term 'ancient capitalism' not all together inappropriate? Alternatively, if certain practices, like property speculation and money lending were in scope and principal capitalist, then the economy of the later Roman Empire would be of a capitalist nature like ours. However, to what extent can we draw a clear and plausible distinction between the ancient and the modern economic order? The decline or downfall of the Roman Empire lies according to Weber in the inner logic of the Roman economy and its bureaucratic organisation leading to an 'internal disintegration of the ancient civilisation'.<sup>65</sup> The major difference to the modern capitalist system of Weber's times is that in antiquity, a system of production for mass consumption in which the market played a crucial role never emerged. Similar to Marx's base/superstructure dynamic, Weber sets out the general dynamics in the separation between an *exchange economy* or *market economy* ('*Tauschwirtschaft*'), which emerged as a superstructure, and its basis, the *barter* or *natural economy* ('*Naturwirtschaft*'), which was still expanding, and 'in which needs are met without exchange.'<sup>66</sup> Even the production by slaves on the farms was not designed for market exchange, but rather to satisfy the needs and wants of the *latifundi*. Bücher made the point earlier that the estate owner took pride in the self-sufficiency of his farm and that he was looked down upon when having to buy commodities which he should be able to produce in-house at market. All profit that was gained from the slaves could then be used to import luxury goods or to buy masters of craft in order to show-off to his neighbours and friends how skilful and well-trained his slaves were in providing him with riches, elegant gowns and other treasures.

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<sup>62</sup> Love (1991) p. 19.

<sup>63</sup> *MWG* 1/2 129 and Love (1991) p. 1 n9)

<sup>64</sup> Deininger (1990) p. 144 f.

<sup>65</sup> See Duy (1932) p 191.

<sup>66</sup> *WG* p. 448.

A significant step in arriving at the conclusion that ancient Rome was essentially capitalist is Weber's example of the institutionalisation of the right to landed property, which he discussed in great detail. However, in distinction to private ownership, it is a communal or clan-like ownership that was characteristic. Individual use stood against the institution of individual ownership. Gradually this difference disappeared, and so rules which stipulated that property could only be passed on for a specific purpose, such as gift or reward giving, were abolished and undermined. What remained was the exclusion of foreigners. The *lex agraria* of 111 BC according to Weber was the institutionalisation that followed the imperial trend. Such a law allowed for the complete possession of landed property by titles, which still exists in some European countries today.

In summary, international trade increased the size of the estates to large, still fairly self-sufficient farmyards that were run on the basis of forced labour. The self-sufficient rural estates undermined and crowded-out the local exchange based economies of the cities, by being able to produce commodities cheaper and in larger quantities.<sup>67</sup> 'An intermediate authority was interposed between the state and the colonies - the landowner...the old simple distinction between free and forced labour had been replaced by a division of society into landowner and land-free peasant.'<sup>68</sup> A series of changes, each in itself quite gradual, together constructed a development towards this new social structure, which economic and legislative conditions brought about - feudalism, which started to emerge in the Later Roman Empire.<sup>69</sup> Whereas under the previous system, market access was very restricted and trade for profit was deemed to be immoral, the new system, as Love asserts, did not even have the space for small exchange value production.<sup>70</sup> The Empire as such was to become a self-sufficient household with no need for fiscal regulation. The attempts to run the system with a high degree of efficiency and gain financial control failed and resulted in an even more bureaucracy. State administration could no longer cope with regional uprisings. Even efforts to reorganise the military forces failed because of disintegration in its ranks. In that way, extensive and self-serving bureaucracy was as a major factor in the decline of the Roman Empire.

It seems indeed that at this point we could say that Weber's interpretation of the ancient economy lies between that of Bücher and Meyer, since Weber at first glance forms only a quantitatively different view from the two, leaving the rejection of the theory of

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<sup>67</sup> Weber (1988) p. 396 ff

<sup>68</sup> See Weber (1988) p. 345 f.

<sup>69</sup> Weber (1988) p. 345 f.

economic stages aside. The field of expertise also seems to bear a problem: as we noted earlier Meyer regarded Bücher's theory of the 'closed household economy' as an inadequate schematisation of ancient history by a non-historian. Meyer's categorical rejection of Bücher's thesis carries however the nasty undertone of academic pomposity and arrogance with it. Bücher, on the contrary, tried to theorise over a specific and complex phenomenon called the ancient economy from an economist's point of view and the tools at hand to him – in Bücher's case the theory of economic stages – were to some degree reducing the richness and complexity of the political and cultural life of the ancients under the stage of the household economy.

Weber though approached the subject from a legal historical angle, which may have put him between the two sides. From a political and theoretical angle, he had to criticise Bücher and the school of historical political economy for assuming some kind of gradual development of the economy from the lower (not necessarily primitive) household based system to the sophisticated market economy. This however is not to say that Weber rejected the Rodbertus-Bücher view about the *oikos* character of the Roman agrarian constitution.<sup>71</sup> In an extensive essay *Untersuchungen auf dem Gebiete der Nationaloekonomie des Klassischen Altertums* ('Investigations in the Field of Political Economy of Classical Antiquity'), Karl Rodbertus undertook to deliver an explanation of the emergence of the Colonies<sup>72</sup> and believed that the *oikos* was the truly determining factor of every kind of ancient economic state.<sup>73</sup> The latter aspect was mainly important for Bücher, since Rodbertus formulated the theorem of the '*Oikentheorie*' ('oikos theory') of the ancient economy, which for most contemporary ancient historians is now entirely outdated.<sup>74</sup> Although intellectual compliments and frequent references to Rodbertus in Weber's *Römische Agrargeschichte* are very rare, certain parallels are clearly visible and should not be ignored, especially in the light of Weber's acknowledgement that the

<sup>70</sup> Love (1991) p. 28.

<sup>71</sup> 'For Rome I regard my initial standpoint, which I expressed already extensively in my 'Roman Agrarian History' (*Römische Agrargeschichte*), and which were inspired by Rodbertus, as correct in all main points, despite some juvenile mistakes.' Weber (1891) p. 18.

<sup>72</sup> The structure of his work is based the focus on a legal interpretation of the ancient economy similar to Savingny. The abstract economic analysis and the use of the ideal-type goes back to Johann Heinrich von Thuenen and Karl Rodbertus, who also used and admits, perhaps surprisingly, the existence of flexible capital in antiquity. Deininger *MWG* 1/2 p. 24 n 52.

<sup>73</sup> This is of course not to say that according to Rodbertus, the ancient economy was in reality purely household based. The '*Oiken Wirtschaft*' is rather a theoretical abstraction, the most fundamental characteristics or basis of 'economic life' and does not represent in all detail the 'economic' appearances or reality of the everyday life of the ancient civilisations. See Deininger in *MWG* 1/2 p 20 n 31 and Rodbertus (1864-1868) vol 5 (1865) p. 342 n3.

<sup>74</sup> Deininger *MWG* 1/2 p 21 n33-38.

groundwork for the '*Oikentheorie*' was delivered by Rodbertus. The main emphasis of his basic methodological approach is to try to understand the ancient economic sphere in a theoretical manner. The '*Oikentheorie*' seemed to cover initially the essence of this economy and Rodbertus deserves the credit for having attempted such a theorisation. However, the reliance on the works of Rodbertus becomes perhaps more apparent in Weber's work *Die Agrarverhältnisse im Altertum* of 1897.<sup>75</sup> Weber, like Rodbertus, recognised that the strong state administration which carried state-imperialistic characteristics protected and used the relative self-sufficiency of the households for their political purposes. From an economic theoretical point of view, of which Meyer was no expert, Weber rejected swift modernising parallels between periods of antiquity and early modern capitalism, which became mostly apparent with Meyer's lack of sharpness with regard to an account of a scientific concept formation in economic history.<sup>76</sup> However, Weber primarily takes issue with the extent of exchange in antiquity, rather than with Meyer's limited theory of historical concept formation and philosophy of history.<sup>77</sup> The latter will be discussed in the next chapter.

Weber's strength, compared to Meyer, was not to add sources of evidence to the subject of ancient social history, but the penetration of the ancient society with a new theoretical approach. He shows a far stronger analytical depth and awareness of the manifold factors in his attempt to conceptualise the problems of ancient social and economic life. Hence, it would not be satisfactory to claim that Weber simply developed Meyer's analysis; he was to set a new conceptual framework to supersede Meyer's position despite being influenced by the latter and the tradition of the Historical School. Weber did not abandon legal and political history, but added the essential social and economic component as a fundamental representation of the degree of rationalisation of the organisation of a civilisation.

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<sup>75</sup> Heuss praised this work as one 'which was solely devoted to antiquity. The *Handwörterbuch* article was a 'proper' book. In respect of its context it was one of the most original, ventures and continuously forcefulness description in ancient economic and social history'. See Heuss (1965) p. 538f.

<sup>76</sup> See Mazza (1984) p. 537.

<sup>77</sup> See Weber's sceptical remarks in the *Agrarverhältnisse* about the scope of local and inter-local exchange in antiquity due to the increase of mass slavery as a predominant social force. Weber (1897) p. 18 as above.

### *iii. Weber and the Historiographical Methods of his Time*

In the following section we will investigate whether Weber was able to resolve any of the methodological problems that became apparent with the Bücher-Meyer Controversy and the *Lamprechtstreit*, which coincided with the controversy. As proposed earlier, we will analyse in what way Weber's approach towards historical concept formation different from that of the historicist tradition. Here Eduard Meyer's theses in his *THEORIE* and *Anthropologie*, which Weber scrutinised in his *Kritische Studien*, will serve us as the first cornerstone for investigating in what way Weber's position has departed from the doctrines of the Historical School with its emphasis on the importance of the historic personalities.

As we have seen, Meyer was certainly influential for Weber's groundwork in ancient legal and agrarian history even though Weber analysed the ancient economy in his early works primarily from a legal historical perspective and later from a cultural and sociological perspective. However, the world of bureaucracy and authority never lay very far away from political decision-making or the law-making of the historical personalities. Weber always acknowledged the role and potential influence of such historical personalities in antiquity and the modern Western world. Hence, the concepts of political history always played an important part in Weber's analyses of the ancient economy. However, Weber showed himself much more open to new methodological approaches in this field, not the least because he aimed to built his economic history on a firm philosophical basis, something many of his predecessors and contemporaries have neglected to do.

Meyer, as Finley noted, was one of the few ancient historians who aimed to establish a scientific methodology in ancient history.<sup>78</sup> Meyer's theses in the *THEORIE* and in parts in his *Anthropologie*, which both formed the conceptual framework for his lifetime achievement, *Die Geschichte des Altertums*, were critically examined by Weber in his *Kritische Studien zur Kulturwissenschaftliche Logik* of 1906.<sup>79</sup> The title of this essay '*Zur Auseinandersetzung mit Eduard Meyer*' reveals clearly that Weber was keen to confront Meyer's philosophy of history, but not because he was opposed to his theory.<sup>80</sup> Weber rather pointed out that it 'must awake great interest, if one of our first historians [Eduard

<sup>78</sup> See again Finley (1984) p. 271 f.

<sup>79</sup> Weber *GAW* (1951) pp. 215-290.

<sup>80</sup> This essay forms chapter 1 of Weber's *Kritische Studien zur Kulturwissenschaftlichen Logik* in *GAW*. Chapter 2 is entitled 'Objective Possibility and Adequate Causation in Historical Causality'

Meyer] saw reason to render an account of the aims and avenues of his own subject.’<sup>81</sup> By doing so, Meyer clearly departed from his own subject and entered the field of epistemology and philosophy of history, by which, according to Weber, ‘Meyer writes a ‘medical report by the patient himself rather than by the doctor.’<sup>82</sup> From the context of this work, Weber does not so much criticise Meyer for elevating himself into the dizzy heights of epistemology, but rather states that Meyer’s presuppositions in this field are underlined by general errors within the traditional historiography. Weber regarded Meyer as one of the main representatives of contemporary historical studies with whom it was worth having a debate on methodology, and he praises the transparency of Meyer’s thesis.<sup>83</sup> With this analysis in the *Kritische Studien*, Weber was not aiming to participate in the *Lamprechtstreit* or in the dispute between Bücher and Meyer by concentrating his criticism on Meyer.<sup>84</sup> It is rather his aim to apprehend the relevance of Meyer’s position in respect to the meaning of a ‘logical historical enquiry’.<sup>85</sup> Whether Weber himself formulates an independent and alternative method, with which he seriously departs from the predominant scholarly background of historicism, is to be investigated later.<sup>86</sup>

Central to Meyer’s thesis are the following claims which we already discussed in detail in Part I, ch. 2.vi. Firstly, he objected that history is based on a single universal principal. For example, Hegel’s concept of ‘world history’ as the materialisation of the *Weltgeist* or an underlining materialist principle, those of class struggle, for example.<sup>87</sup> Both approaches, which were to some degree present in materialism and empiricism, increasingly challenged the predominant position of Political History. According to Meyer, part of his opponent’s universality claims was the agenda to belittle the actuality of the ‘free will’ of the historical individuals and to demean the power of ideas and the essential importance of the presence of the accident in the creation of historical events. In fact, events themselves are, according to Lamprecht’s and Bücher’s theories, completely subsumed under material process and economic stages, Meyer asserted in a familiar

<sup>81</sup> Weber *GAW* p. 215.

<sup>82</sup> For a more detailed analysis of the comparisons of Weber’s and Meyer’s text see Lieberschütz (1963) p. 272 ff., p. 303ff.

<sup>83</sup> *GAW* p. 216.

<sup>84</sup> *GAW* p. 231.

<sup>85</sup> *GAW* p. 217.

<sup>86</sup> Weber expresses even his ‘unlimited admiration’ for Meyer’s scholarly career and emphasises that he does not take anything away of Meyer’s scholarly standing. See Honigsheim, P.: ‘Max Weber zum Gedächtnis’ in König (1985) p. 206 f. It is therefore difficult to see how M. I. Finley came to the conclusion that Meyer’s work was ‘torn apart by Weber’ in Finley (1984) p. 271. See also Tenbruck ‘Max Weber and Eduard Meyer’ in Mommsen (1986) p. 242f and n47.

exaggerated manner.<sup>88</sup> Instead, Meyer stresses that the dominating and most obvious element in history is the political history, and since human beings are for Meyer political beings, this dominant character will remain predominate until man 'changes his nature'. Cultural and economic history are reductive. 'The political events are most influential and most important to our life'.<sup>89</sup> Secondly, essential to Meyer's *THEORIE* was also the claim that scientific historical judgements can be 'objective', that the perspective of some historians is closer to the historical truth than that of others.<sup>90</sup>

Weber argued against Meyer that a historian cannot separate the past from his entanglement in a certain political doctrine or value system, or his 'present'. It is therefore impossible to produce an objective and unconditional picture of the past.<sup>91</sup> Weber asserted in particular, that Meyer's concept of the 'effective' *das Wirksame*, once applied in historical judgements, is dependent on the specific evaluations of the historian. However, the epistemological roots of these evaluations are situated beyond the historical detail and are therefore logically separate.<sup>92</sup> By failing to acknowledge this difference, Weber suggests that Meyer does not grasp the fundamental difference between value relations and causal analysis, its importance and missing application to the concept of the 'effective' and of 'historical interest' in historical methodology. Furthermore, the concept of the causally 'important and effective' is in Meyer's view only assigned to events. Weber asserted that this displays a far too narrow understanding, because it excludes the 'important and effective' in the biography of the individual.<sup>93</sup> Meyer seems to over-simplify the causal importance and weight that the single event may have for other historical events. For example, Meyer believed that the outcome of the Persian Wars had an impact on the whole of ancient thought, the *Politics* of Aristotle, the development of Judaism, or the II Punic Wars on the whole political development of the ancient world.<sup>94</sup> What Weber seems unable to accept is that there is a strict ontological difference between a development and an event. That historians deal only with the latter and how the event came about, that is either

<sup>87</sup> That Hegel's 'philosophy of history' was based on idealist presuppositions and that Meyer may have misunderstood his stance does not fall directly into the remit of our discussion. See Riedel (1962) 541 ff.

<sup>88</sup> See Part I.2.vi.

<sup>89</sup> *THEORIE* p. 56 f. See also Tenbruck in Mommsen (1986) p 350 f.

<sup>90</sup> We discussed Meyer's notion of 'objective' historical knowledge in Part I.2.vi. pp 62-64, which should not be misinterpreted as universally infallible. Weber listed Meyer's theses concisely in the *Kritischen Studien*. See *GAW* p. 218.

<sup>91</sup> Cf. *THEORIE* p. 37f, 45f. Meyer's thesis is not correctly interpreted by Weber. What seems to be more befitting is to criticise Meyer's faith in a worldview that claims to be somehow more 'objective' than the alternative approach by the empiricists.

<sup>92</sup> *GASW* pp 249-251

<sup>93</sup> *THEORIE* p. 47 ff.

through causes by other events or 'free' decision-making of an individual, does not logically separate it from a process.<sup>95</sup> Weber suggests instead is that although the scope and impact of a historical event might be subject to values, the fact as such, when supported by sources, can be an object of scientific enquiry. These take the form of inter-subjective results like in the natural sciences.<sup>96</sup>

Weber's very balanced and by all means appreciative presentation of Meyer's *Theorie*, includes besides the many acknowledgements of Meyer's position, a considerable shift away from the paradigms of Meyer and the Historical School. The reproach remains that Meyer fails to convince his readers that there is indeed a logical distinction between ethical value judgements and causal explanations in history, which, according to Weber, are not separable.<sup>97</sup>

Weber pointed out against Meyer that in order to maintain a causal historical analysis one cannot only consider the '*Realgründe*' i.e. the 'historical object' in its own right, but the historian has to be aware of his own epistemology and its methodological limitations too, that his way of historical analysis is also dependent on a value structure, which remains historically relative. This includes an acknowledgement that this epistemology is value dependent and not independent. That is to say, past and present are generally linked not only through causal relations, but also through the epistemology of the historian.<sup>98</sup>

The historical '*Historische*' is, for Weber, not determined by either the 'mass typical' '*Massenerscheinung*' or by the specific '*Individuelle*' or by the causally effective '*das Wirksame*'. It is rather based on 'value relations', '*Wertbeziehungen*'.<sup>99</sup> The causally effective is in his understanding rather than our perception of the past, which is determined through certain values, something we project into the past regardless of whether there is any direct or indirect link between the ancient culture and ours. The writing of history is, for Weber, always influenced by the interests of the present and therefore necessarily includes not only causally effective judgements, but things which are parts of culture '*Kulturbestandteile*'.<sup>100</sup> It is this latter element that Meyer seemed to have completely subsumed under the political. As we have seen in Part I, Meyer was by no means denying

<sup>94</sup> See Deininger (1990) p. 149 f. and Meyer *GdA* vol. III 1 190 ff.

<sup>95</sup> *GAW* p. 221.

<sup>96</sup> We are remind on the philosophical relationship between Heinrich Rickert and Weber.

<sup>97</sup> *GAW* p. 223 f.

<sup>98</sup> *GAW* p. 234 ff.

<sup>99</sup> *GAW* p. 221 f.

that the historian has to judge what is from his stance historically effective and important. Weber only disagrees in as much as there can be nothing objective to determine the historically important.

However, besides all this criticism, Weber is by no means denying the existence of historical accident nor is belittling the importance of historic personalities. He agrees with Meyer that it cannot be the task of historical studies to formulate 'laws' of history as in the empirical sciences. However, the mere analysis of the 'individual event' or simply the individual aspect alone, is not sufficient to deliver a scientific historical analysis. Weber, however, remains nevertheless closer to Meyer and the method propagated by Historical School of *Nationalökonomie*, which viewed the political elements and constitutional components in history that manifest themselves in the social and cultural life of human civilisations, as the 'actual backbone of the historical'.<sup>101</sup> In opposition to many historians of the historicist tradition, Weber did not see a rational principle or idea that was human history.<sup>102</sup> However, rational principles can be found in the development of political institutions and legal systems within cultures, which can be investigated by the historian with rational concepts that grasp both the general and specific character of historical phenomena on the basis of rational concepts formulated by the historian.

Besides Weber's highlighting of some obvious weaknesses in aspects of Meyer's historiographical method, Finley's argument 'that Max Weber did not think it was worth the trouble to demolish his [Meyer's] theory and method of history,' cannot hold true.<sup>103</sup> Such an alleged intellectual snobbery would perhaps be more applicable to Eduard Meyer's, and particularly Karl Julius Beloch's, scepticism towards scholars in other academic disciplines, who, according to them, tried their luck in vain in ancient history. Weber though, analysed in a very detailed fashion the weaknesses and positive elements of Meyer's theory and held the latter scholar in great regard especially for his groundwork in ancient history. Weber rejected the idea of a universal history that was presupposed by Ranke, Niebuhr and Meyer, which assumes the possibility of a general intercultural, inter-subjective historical viewpoint, which allows for inter-temporal or ahistorical comparisons between cultures. Weber's own view of how scientific historical concept formation

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<sup>100</sup> See Meyer *THEORIE* p. 30 Important for Weber is not the historical object itself, but rather its effect on other events in the past and its possible continuing effect on the present. See *GAW (Kritische Studien)* p. 259

<sup>101</sup> *GAW (Kritische Studien)* p. 228 f.

<sup>102</sup> See Viikari (1977) p. 435.

<sup>103</sup> Finley (1980) p. 159 n94. Weber's suggestion does not follow from his rather rare comments and from the intellectual connection between the two authors, which certainly has shown similarities. In respect of

becomes possible is perhaps best explained by focusing on Weber's development of the 'ideal-type' as an adequate means to find valid abstractions to describe historical events and processes. Weber's theory of historic concept formation will also lead us to shed light onto his usage of the concept of 'ancient capitalism' and will assist us in determining Weber's position within or outwith the Bücher-Meyer Controversy more clearly.

So far we have only indicated Meyer's influence on Weber, in perception and critique. Some authors emphasise a stronger intellectual influence of Meyer on Weber, but they rather seem to take a conjectural form. Emanuele Narducci, for example, traces Weber's interest into the 'bureaucratisation' of late antiquity back to Meyer.<sup>104</sup> There is little evidence that this connection can be made so swiftly. Meyer's discussion of bureaucracy as a main factor of the decline of Rome in the *WEdA* and the *GdA*, was in some way proceeded by Weber's ground work in legal Roman law as early as 1891 in his *Römische Agrargeschichte*.<sup>105</sup> We will focus on this aspect of Weber's academic work for an understanding of Weber's philosophy of history and the effects this stance has on his description of the ancient economy.

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Meyer, Finley's assertions are, like Bücher's, filled with polemic, whereas Bücher had at least a good reason to do so. See also Finley's remarks on Meyer's *WEdA*. See Finley (1984) p. 271.

<sup>104</sup> Narducci (1981) p. 35.

<sup>105</sup> *RA* p. 291 n4, 352.

*iv. Rational Agency and the 'Ideal-Type'*

As we noted earlier in Part II, historical studies as an academic discipline reached an intellectual maturity and political influence in Germany towards the end of the nineteenth century.<sup>106</sup> Not only had political and military history reached a high degree of comprehensiveness, but also the history of law, in particular of Roman law. Also the history of religion, and late in the century the history of bureaucratic institutions. When we add the elevated status and importance of the history of the cultural inheritance of antiquity in general for the education of the German citizen, then we can perhaps understand why Weber and many of his colleagues dealt not only within strict disciplinary confines of their own subjects but ventured well beyond their own remit. We have already noted Meyer's versatile interests in religion, philosophy and economic history. Weber too was a master of the history of political institutions and all related matters. Unlike his predecessors Böckh and Büchschütz, Weber's reputation was not built as a historian, but as scholar of the history of Roman law. However, the increasing interest in Roman law from the early 19<sup>th</sup> century onwards, became an essential component of academic teaching and focus in the training of Prussia's bureaucrats. Besides this, Weber seemed to have had the rare gift of 'seeing history as a concatenation or a linking of unique events and not repeatable complexities', as Collins described it.<sup>107</sup> This must of course also include processes. With the adoption of civil law-based codes across Europe in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the status of the study of Roman law changed from pure historical interest to actual, political interests. This is of course not to say that Roman law was practised in Prussia, but its study formed the fundamental basis for every law student to understand and work alongside the newly established legal system of the Bismarck legislation.<sup>108</sup> With the rise of Roman law history and ancient history in general came the question, posed by Savigny, over the relevance or justification of Roman legislation over the peoples and states annexed by Rome, who already had a legal system, an ethics and their religion. Weber's main work *Wirtschaft und Gesellschaft* reflects to a considerable degree on this controversy surrounding Sanvigny. Weber aims to show how the way in which the process of rationalisation in the law and in other crucial areas of political life is entangled with other historical processes and events. Weber knew from the history of law that even the

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<sup>106</sup> See Collins (1980) p. 935.

<sup>107</sup> See Collins (1980) pp. 925-42.

<sup>108</sup> Cf. Factor (1994) p. 138.

most fundamental concepts of human agency have changed through history, that the maxims of everyday life do not necessarily match with what is legally prescribed by the state or socially acceptable by society. This becomes more obvious when we consider the dilemma every human-being faces when contemplating how one acts and how one should act. Hence, any science that attempts to understand human agency, whether collectively or individually, has got to deal with the problem of conceptualising social and historical phenomena. The key to understanding how Weber tackled this problem in the social sciences is connected to his view of conceptualisation in civil law. Weber saw the discrepancies between our cultural categories and those of other historical periods not as something absolute, but as being relative to the standpoint of the scientist. Hence concept formation in the historical sciences is also a mundane and practical problem.<sup>109</sup> The concepts formed in these sciences also have to be tailored to the understanding of the audience. On the other hand, our habitual modes may not apply to the historical material that we aim to comprehend and therefore concepts have to be defined, which best describe to us the specific historical phenomenon. Such concepts are called ideal-types by Weber.

The 'ideal-type' provides a basis for comparative historical studies, a method that Bücher relied on heavily in the *EdV*. The ideal-type is not to be confused with the best, perfect or most useful entity. Weber's description of ancient economy as a 'city, coastal and slavery culture', does not depict any of those aspects as ideal for anyone. An ideal-type is an analytical construct that serves as a tool to the historian in order to determine the character and extent to which particular historical social institutions are similar or different from our own.<sup>110</sup>

Weber's discussion of social action is an example of the use of an ideal-type. The ideal-type involves determining the 'logically consistent' features of a social institution. In this way, the ideal-type does not necessarily correspond to a particular concrete reality but is a description to which we can compare reality. The formation of such ideal-types, as we have seen to some degree in Bücher, holds of course not only the problem of generalisation and isolation, but also the problem of selecting and neglecting materials that do not fit the 'ideal-type', but do not jeopardise the application of such a type. Objectivity in historical studies, as for Ranke and the historicists, to grasp a phenomenon 'as it really was', is an illusion for Weber, due to the absence of completeness and finality in historical processes

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<sup>109</sup> See Factor (1994) p. 141.

<sup>110</sup> See Coser (1970) p. 236.

or events.<sup>111</sup> The ideal-type is for Weber part of conceptual schemes, which aim to comprehend historical phenomena, but the pragmatic interests of the historian also govern their formation, 'they are purpose relative, relative to our purposes as historians and in our culturally pre-given sense of significance.'<sup>112</sup>

The legal sciences are for Weber, dogmatic sciences 'The line between the dogmatic sciences of law and history as pragmatic sciences of history runs through the category of legal history.'<sup>113</sup> The former deals with valid statements, the latter with statements that have practical significance.<sup>114</sup> This leaves history, including economic history to be a tool for particular interest groups, a possibility Weber was aware of. Weber's solution to this problem is tied in with his approach towards concept formation in history, which he developed from the neo-Kantian philosophers, Windelband and Rickert, and the significance of the economy and its institutions as an expression of the level of rationality in society.

If the historian imagines that explicit abstractions are 'useless or dispensable for his concrete heuristic purposes, the inevitable consequence is either that he consciously or unconsciously uses other similar concepts without formulating them verbally or elaborating them logically, or that he remains stuck in the realm of what is vaguely felt. Against the Historical School, who according to Weber, dispute the validity of economic concepts in the historical sciences he argued that 'those, who are so contemptuous as to dispute the "Robinsonades" of classical theory, should restrain themselves if they are unable to replace them with better concepts, which in this context means clearer concepts.'<sup>115</sup>

The employment of such concepts bears of course ethical presuppositions and value statements from which no historian can rid himself completely. Influential to Weber's dissolution with the ideal of a universal worldview, based on a set of objective truths, was the work of his contemporary, Ernst Troeltsch. He sought an explanation of how it was possible that Ranke and the *Historismus*, which once been the source of 'liberation and intellectual uplift', had become in the contemporary world a burden and a source of 'perplexity'.<sup>116</sup> Troeltsch found his answer in the relativist, and in parts sceptical,

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<sup>111</sup> Factor (1994) p.142.

<sup>112</sup> Factor (1994) p.142.

<sup>113</sup> Factor (1994) p. 148.

<sup>114</sup> *GAW (Roscher und Knies)* p. 94. Here Weber criticises his colleagues in *Nationalökonomie* Roscher and Knies. The essay is entitled 'Roscher and Knies: the Logical problems in Historical Political Economy'.

<sup>115</sup> *GAW (Objectivität der Sozialwissenschaftlichen Erkenntnis)* p. 171 f.

<sup>116</sup> Troeltsch (1916) p. 12.

interpretations of the totality of human history in the works of Dilthey, Windelband, Bergson and Croce.<sup>117</sup> Troeltsch knew that the study of history could not provide an unequivocal ethical guide. He was disillusioned with the search for a universal code or set of indisputable historical facts.<sup>118</sup> It was the example of Troeltsch which brought Weber even closer to the conclusion that there is no such a thing as a historical fact.<sup>119</sup> Only the empirical data combined with the previously formed concepts allows us to read meaning and purpose into history.

With regard to this particular view, Weber and Rickert are in agreement. Where the two differ from each other is that Rickert rejects all metaphysical support for his own values of objectivity and ethical neutrality. Impartiality and ethical neutrality are of course not immortal values. However, Weber intended to emphasise, against the common practice of his time, that professors at German universities used their post for political propaganda and received protection from the state when they commented on public matters. However, it is also a well-known fact that Weber himself used his academic position in order to make passionate statements about social and political matters. 'An attitude of moral indifference', Weber insisted, 'has no connection with scientific objectivity.'<sup>120</sup> This meant for Weber a kind of mutual interaction between attempting scientific concept formation in the cultural and historical sciences and the awareness of personal values. The method is useful in order to show which values are somehow consistent with one another and which are not. It could determine the consequences or implications of a proposed course of action. It could estimate what 'an attainment of a desired end would cost in terms of the predictable loss of other values, but it could not make the act of choice itself: that is the sole responsibility of the acting individual'. In short, 'an empirical science could not tell anyone what one *should* do, but rather what one *can* do - and under certain circumstances - what one wishes to do'.<sup>121</sup> For Weber, that ultimately meant that it is only the value '*Wert*', once employed by human beings, which is capable of giving our existence meaning in the double sense of comprehensibility and purpose. This meaning for Weber is nothing else but culture i.e. social culture, which is to be understood as something human beings have a general attachment to; things that beyond

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<sup>117</sup> See Hofer (1950).

<sup>118</sup> Troeltsch made his critical break with idealism already in 1904 with his critique on Kant's philosophy of history. See Troeltsch (1904), but see also Troeltsch (1916)

<sup>119</sup> See also Graf 'Friendship between experts: Notes on Weber and Troeltsch' in Mommsen' (1987).

<sup>120</sup> *GAW (Objectivität)* p. 157.

our possessions and family have a meaning and significance to us.<sup>122</sup> 'To put it very simply, Weber maintained that the social and cultural sciences, the method and objects, that precedes the method of investigation and the theory of knowledge, were simply different aspects of the same thing.'<sup>123</sup>

Whilst Rickert and Windelband, on the one side, and Dilthey, on the other, disagreed about the problem as to whether the natural sciences are fundamentally different from the cultural sciences in the object they pursue or by the methodology they employ, it was not the central focus for Weber. Weber believed that the object of investigation defines itself through the very method that is employed. It is immaterial as to whether one emphasises the object or method of investigation.<sup>124</sup> Thus, the whole philosophical debate about the validity of our knowledge of the historical and social world would simply fall apart. 'Philosophy cannot define what historicity is; it can only tell us how historical and social phenomena are investigated.'<sup>125</sup>

Weber departed from Rickert and Windelband and moved towards Dilthey's position. He abandoned the possibility of the absoluteness of value judgements and discarded all metaphysical support for objective ethical norms. Weber viewed the position of the scientists as being mutually determined by the progression of the investigation and the cultural world one is embedded. This was a complex unilateral method, being incapable of making any finite conclusion about economic history and its method. He had arrived at a subjectivist perspective leading him to the conclusion that a fixed reality in the social world does not exist and no methodology can ever achieve such a fixed angle. This however would make it pointless to choose between object and method, because neither of them are deniable or true.

Let us return to the 'ideal-type' and Droysen's method of *Verstehen* mentioned in Part II.2.iii. *Verstehen* was the method that all investigations about society amongst historicists had previously employed. It was the origin of Dilthey's 're-experiencing' and Croce's 're-thinking'. It was what Hughes called the method 'to feel oneself into' a historical action or situation by putting oneself into the place or mind of the action or into the mind of the agent. - a method of psychological sympathy - a method that distinguished

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<sup>121</sup> Ethical neutrality is perhaps the wrong translation for what Weber means by a kind of liberalism that claims to be morally neutral. He calls it '*Gesinnungslosigkeit*', which is a rather negative term for anyone deliberately oblivious towards ethical questions. *GAW (Objectivität)* p. 158.

<sup>122</sup> *GAW* p. 83, 174.

<sup>123</sup> Hughes (1959) p. 309.

<sup>124</sup> Explicit reference to Dilthey is only made in the essay 'Roscher and Knies' in *GAW* p. 34, 43.

<sup>125</sup> Hughes (1959) p. 314.

sharply between the 'inner' investigation of the human world from the merely external investigation '*Anschauung*' (view point) of the natural world.

What Weber was criticising and tried to achieve in his economic history was that one cannot exclusively rest at *Verstehen*. 'He sought to limit its range and aimed to combine it with a causal explanation of the quasi-positivist type. '*Verstehen*' he asserts, must...be controlled so far as possible by the...usual method of causal imputation, before even the most evident interpretation can become a valid intelligible explanation.'<sup>126</sup> Knowledge derived from *Verstehen* must be verified by empirical testing 'Of necessity it had something arbitrary about it. It was frankly and unashamedly a construction of the human mind.'<sup>127</sup>

Weber's definition of the ideal-type' was clearly related to the notion of cause. An ideal-type might be conceived as a unilateral complex of causal explanations.<sup>128</sup> This might be *class*, or genetic concepts, so called '*Gattungsbegriffe*' - ideas in the sense of thought patterns which actually exist in the mind of human beings, ideas which govern human beings, ideas with which the historian approaches historical facts - theoretical constructs using empirical data illustratively - historical investigations which utilise theoretical concepts as ideal limiting cases, various complex combinations that might be multiplied indefinitely.<sup>129</sup> First, they are genetic types or classifications of social phenomena, for example, church and government. Secondly, they are idealised individual complexes of phenomena such as socialism and capitalism. Also, the purpose of ideal-types is, for Weber, to order and understand the historical sources.<sup>130</sup> The ideal-types are only justified in so far as they are beneficial in understanding a particular historical phenomenon. This of course leaves us with the problem of determining what constitutes the nature of scientific historical understanding. The use of the ideal-type as a methodological tool is fundamental to Weber's definition of ancient capitalism, and will give us further clarification about his position within the Bücher-Meyer Controversy.

<sup>126</sup> Weber 'Kategorien der Verstehenden Soziologie' in *GAW* p. 428.

<sup>127</sup> Pearson (1956) p. 78

<sup>128</sup> Abel (1948) p. 212.

<sup>129</sup> *GAW* (*Roscher und Knies*) p. 8.

<sup>130</sup> See *GAW* p. 216 and *WG* pp. 3-4.

### v. *Ancient and Modern Capitalism*

During the writing of *The Agrarian Sociology of Ancient Civilisation* between 1897-1909, Weber wrote the *Protestant Ethics and the Spirit of Capitalism* and other essays such as 'Objectivity' in *Social Science and Social Policy* in which the epistemology of the 'ideal-type' was developed. Through these works it became apparent that Weber recognised the problem of the growth of modern capitalism as a very complex issue in definition, development and historicity that can only be understood by addressing the heart of the problem, that of institutional rationalisation and rational agency.

Confronted with Bücher's *EdV*, which attracted Weber's attention directly after the 3<sup>rd</sup> German Historian Conference in 1893, probably through the correspondence in the *Verein für Sozialpolitik*, of which he and Bücher were both members, Weber was not so much faced with the issue as to whether the ancient economy was primitive or modern, but whether we can grasp its importance for the emergence of modern political economy and sociology through concepts which enable us to conceptualise history without reading it completely from the perspective of the modern world. Here the question of how social, 'economic' and legal institutions became more rational than previous ones played a crucial part. In order to understand and determine the nature of the modern bureaucratic structure an understanding of the history of its insertions and culture is essential.

Having outlined the utilitarian and materialist interpretation of the social and 'economic' nature in Beloch and partly in Pöhlmann, we saw that their writings are dominated by the idea that the economic/capitalist rationality of the German or European mind was to a degree deliberately pulled over the heads of the ancients. This allowed swift and exaggerated analogies between the status of ancient and modern economic life to be drawn, regardless of the attempted complexity in their account of the 'economic' and social conditions of the ancient city. Weber, on the contrary, attempted to deliver a solution to overcome the methodological discrepancies between the social and the historical sciences by emphasising the cultural categories and norms in his time compared to other historical eras and cultures of the past. Here again the fascination for the ancients in the Romantic tradition of the enlightenment and in modernity can be assumed as having had a strong influence on almost every German scholar in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, including Weber.

In the *Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, Weber concluded with regard to his own age, that of capitalism, that 'man is dominated by the making of money, by acquisition as the ultimate purpose of his life. Economic acquisition is no longer subordinated to man, as the means for the satisfaction of his material needs. This reversal of what we should call the natural relationship, so irrational from a naive point of view, is evidently as definitely a leading principle of capitalism as it is foreign to all peoples not under a capitalist influence.'<sup>131</sup>

The concept of the *ideal-type* evolved in the system of modern capitalism with a set of conceptual clarified notions, which include rational economic action, rational calculation, and rational division of labour and rational technology.<sup>132</sup> 'Ideal capitalism' for example is not, according to Weber, a system which is ideal to all human beings living under its power, but according to the ideal-type, consists of private ownership, pursuit of profit and *laissez faire*. Clearly, none of these features are particularly ethical *per se* - a point Weber was aware of. In reality, all capitalist systems deviate from the theoretical construct that Weber called 'ideal capitalism.' However, according to Weber, the construct allows us to compare and contrast economic systems of various societies to this definition and allows a comparative analysis between different systems of social cultural order.

Modern capitalism is compared to some previous forms of behaviour in antiquity more rational than the ancient order. This brings us again to the question as to what constitutes a rational action or a capitalist activity by an ancient. According to Weber, in the ancient economy, capitalist activities included sea trade for profit, slave trade, imperialistic colonisation, tax farming, and professional money lending. The development from such forms into the industrial capitalism of the modern age of Weber's times was not causally conditioned by a shift of the purpose of the economy as in Marx for example, but by an increase in the degree of economic rationalisation.<sup>133</sup> Modern capitalism is therefore

<sup>131</sup> Weber (1904) p. 44.

<sup>132</sup> Weber's distinction between 'economic action' and 'rational economic action' and substantive and formal rationality. *WG* pp. 44-45

<sup>133</sup> Marx makes the point in *Cap.* I.iv.3 p. 17 for a discussion of the concept of use value and exchange value 'The Capitalist Character of Manufacture' with reference to Xenophon: 'Political Economy, which as an independent science, first sprang into being during the period of manufacture, views the social division of labour only from the standpoint of manufacture, and sees in it only the means of producing more commodities with a given quantity of labour, and, consequently, of cheapening commodities and hurrying on the accumulation of capital. In most striking contrast with this accentuation of quantity and exchange-value, is the attitude of the writers of classical antiquity, who hold exclusively by quality and use-value. In consequence of the separation of the social branches of production, commodities are better made, the various bents and talents of men select a suitable field, and without some restraint no important results can be

not ideal capitalism, but in terms of the realisation of its purpose, that of profit making, is more rational than any previous form of economic organisation, for example, slave farming in antiquity. That is to say, economic rationalisation is not to be understood as the all-embracing characteristic of Western economic history, such that the so called 'irrational forms' of economic action are no longer significant. 'The most important question, which stands behind his enquiries [in the Greco-Roman history], and his philosophy of religion too, is: What is the essence of modern capitalism and modern rationality? How did it emerge? In what way were the outer-European world culture systems ('*Weltkultursysteme*') not capable of having them?'<sup>134</sup> Based on the *Grundriss*, the *General Economic History* is Weber's last work in which we find an account of the coming into being of capitalism.<sup>135</sup>

Capitalism is 'rational' in the sense that it is based on rational decision-making driven by speculations of likely returns. This presupposes some degree of predictability of the outcome of 'economic' interaction, which in order for it to work, would itself presuppose a stable and functioning legal system - a legal system that supports institutions, which furthers the interests of the speculators and merchants. Otherwise private investment for money would not be as profitable as intended. A 'well-operating' system of capitalism also supposes that there are free markets for products and for labour and other factors of production, and that these markets are open - given such open markets some innovation in search for profit has room to get under way. Max Weber's concept of rationalisation in economic life, law, administration, and religious ethics, involves the phenomenon of the depersonalisation of human relationships; an increasing emphasis on specialised knowledge, improvements in the techniques of calculation and measurement; and a widening degree of control over social factors and to a degree limiting the extent of natural disasters.

Weber describes actions as value-rational ('*wertrational*') that are derived from the agents belief that acting in a certain way is inherently of worth it for the sake of those principles regardless of its potential utility or benefit for the agent or any other person. Instrumentally rational actions ('*zweckrational*'), which Kant also referred to as hypothetical imperatives of prudence and skill, originate from the agent's expectation that

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obtained anywhere. Hence, both product and producer are improved by division of labour. If the growth of the quantity produced is occasionally mentioned, this is only done with reference to the greater abundance of use-values. There is not a word alluding to exchange-value or to the cheapening of commodities. Marx *Capital* I.iv.3. *MEGA* p. 277.

<sup>134</sup> Heuss (1965) p. 539.

the end result of a certain action will be the best means to achieve another apparent end or purpose.<sup>136</sup> Moreover, the subjective expectations of the agent prior to the action are highly important in determining the type of rationality employed by committing an action. Among the social preconditions of the original development of capitalism is a predictable legal system and behind it is a state bureaucracy. In order to establish open markets, a habit of treating all people as having equal rights and being possible partners in law-regulated commercial dealings has to be fostered in order to encourage entrepreneur activity. The ancient cities often emphasised a strong distinction between insiders and outsiders.<sup>137</sup> According to Weber, those societies which do not encourage commercial bargaining with strangers in particular, do not recognise the rights of outsiders in general. 'Universalistic' religions such as Christianity break down such distinctions. This is why we find behind the legal order of the Roman nations of the Western World the idea of universal citizenship, which equip citizens with rights to give them the impression of not being solely subjects at the ruler's discretion. The legal order also requires a bureaucratic state to enforce the law - professional administrators and jurists.

According to Weber, the bureaucratic state arose partly by rational selection, which one could be tempted to call natural selection. Because such states can create larger and better-organised armies with better weapons and training, they are more likely to succeed. They then also have a natural tendency to increase in size followed by an increasing detachment of the ordinary citizen to their authorities. In this context Weber makes an analogy between capitalism, in which workers do not own the means of production, where office workers do not own their offices or means of administration and armies using centrally supplied and team-operated weapons. The bureaucratic state presupposes literacy, which religion may foster, and various other factors.<sup>138</sup> Religion is therefore a means to further the course of economic growth. Weber especially asserts this for the impact of Protestantism on the development of capitalism. Protestantism, for example, aimed to abolish the monasteries. This abolition of monasteries is important in order to remove an obstruction, namely the preoccupation of people with the strongest religious motivation and replace it with other worldly ends.<sup>139</sup> According to Collins 'Weber's constant theme is that the pattern of relations among the various factors is crucial in

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<sup>135</sup> See Collins (1980), pp. 925-42.

<sup>136</sup> *WG* p. 24.

<sup>137</sup> *WG* p. 37.

<sup>138</sup> *WG* p. 250 f.

<sup>139</sup> *WG* p. 346 f.

determining their effect upon *economic rationalisation*.<sup>140</sup> If one factor by itself, religion or free trade for example, is too dominant, then, according to Weber, capitalism will not develop. For example, if the state is too strong by itself, it has a tendency to crowd out private investment and enterprise. A total hegemony of the Church and the state would create a sphere of uncertainty, which makes a functioning market economy impossible.

The other extreme, a non-regulated economy, would lead to a monopolisation of the economy, a state of fear in which only the most parsimonious would survive. Such an economy fails to address human needs intentionally, since it is not driven by the end or purpose to function of providing the environment for development of the individual. How social factors influence one another is for Weber not a question of simple causation. As for many historians and social philosophers before him, a distinction should be made: between a 'one-factor' causal relationships and dialectical relationships, whereby it is not so much important to determine which cause exactly initiated a process, but how each factor progressively and continuously transformed the other.

Perhaps the transformation was the reinforcement or strengthening of capitalism and the corruption or weakening of Protestantism. Indeed by the 19th century Protestantism in Germany had become a convenient supporter of other social institutions, not a critic or a threat and a shadow of its former self. If the relationship to capitalism was one of mutual or reciprocal influence, or of a feedback, then neither the 'superstructure' nor the 'base' was the originator of social change. What kind of implications does this have for Weber's account of the origin of capitalism?

The *instrumentally rational institutions* involve instrumental and strategic social relations in which individuals operate as means to a set political end, which may be fundamentally different from the goals the individual aims to pursue. Economic and bureaucratic institutions in the market economy develop direct and economic dependencies, which are, or became, ends in themselves and are founded upon domination. This implies that humans are treated not as ends in themselves and that these institutions address their needs rather as means, as consumers, as labour costs etc. Hence, domination is a necessary means if individuals are to be used as means for wider political purposes, which may even be unnatural or estranged from their own goals. This is the reason that Weber could argue that increasing rationalisation involves increasing domination i.e.

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<sup>140</sup> Collins (1980) Especially the chapter on 'The Causal Chain' p. 929 f.

discipline and function but not without giving the individual the illusionary belief of seeing themselves as being free from constraints.

Political rationality as power manifests itself in ancient and modern bureaucracy. Bureaucracy is inevitable and inherent in formal reasoning. It may be accidental that we fail to realise that institutions do increase in size and scope, to be commanding organisations and live to some extent a life and purpose of their own. In turn, those who hold an interest in the growing effectiveness of bureaucratic organisations and state power may encourage such ignorance. It is however, the task of the citizen in a proper democracy to assess the performance of its institutions in order to prevent these institutions from becoming an end in itself. This understanding of reason is the essence of Weber's important journey into ancient social and economic history.

Regarding the overly simplistic question, whether the economy of classical antiquity is primitive or modern, we need to give a brief summary of Weber's analysis of ancient capitalism and how he defined the capitalism of his time. As a matter of fact, Weber maintained that 'ancient Rome passed through a capitalistic development'.<sup>141</sup> This thesis descends partly from Theodor Mommsen's *Römische Geschichte* and appears first in Weber's *Römische Agrargeschichte* of 1891.<sup>142</sup> Regardless of Marx's substantial criticism of Mommsen's thesis, he stuck to this argument throughout his work.<sup>143</sup> When Weber speaks of constraints in the development of capitalism in antiquity, one gets the impression that without those restraints capitalism would have emerged, or that its emergence was historically necessitated.<sup>144</sup>

A significant difference between ancient and modern capitalism is for Weber that the former is dominated by slavery. Slaves played an important part in the social and economic life of classical antiquity. We shall now discuss how relevant this whole issue became in the light of Weber's conception of ancient capitalism.<sup>145</sup>

Often overlooked but of great importance is Weber's definition of the economy and economic activity 'Wirtschaft' and 'wirtschaften' in the *Outline to the Lectures on General ("theoretical") Political Economy* of 1898.<sup>146</sup> Besides the excellent bibliography, which

<sup>141</sup> RA p. 8.

<sup>142</sup> MWG I/2 p. 24.

<sup>143</sup> See Marx' remarks in *Cap.* (MEGA vol 23-25) 23 p. 182 n25, 25 p. 339 n46, *ibid.* p. 795 n43.

<sup>144</sup> See Spahn (1984) pp. 301-323.

<sup>145</sup> Although Deininger in Calder III (1990) p. 139 f. does not see substantial differences and discontinuity between the *Römische Agrargeschichte* and the *Sozialen Gruende*, I believe there is more emphasis in this latter work and famous piece in historiography on the issue of slavery, which is to be insupportable with the whole issue of the ancient economy being modern or primitive.

<sup>146</sup> GVAN p. 29.

gives an extensive overview on the most important works on this subject during Weber's time, we learn also about how Weber attempts to synthesise political economy. Starting with the most general tasks and methodology (introduction), Weber carries on to define the terminological and theoretical foundations of the economic history (book I). Book II is supposed to discuss the natural foundations of the economy, such as demographic considerations as well as constraints of natural resources. Biological as well as anthropological considerations play a part too, the concept of law in political economy, natural selection, as well as cultural and social peculiarities. A striking feature of the *Outline* is that books III to VI deal with the historical foundation of the economy and its theoretical history. The strong emphasis on the growth or development of the economy rests on Weber's belief that social and political entities are going through 'stages' of development.

Also important is Weber's definition of the national economy (*'Volkswirtschaft'*), which he formulates in the *Outline*:<sup>147</sup> 'Economic activity is to be understood by us as a special kind of external goal orientation - that means, conscious plan orientated behaviour in relation to nature and to human beings - which is caused by those needs<sup>148</sup>, which require external means for their satisfaction - no difference whether they [the needs] are of a 'physical' or of 'spiritual' nature, - and which serves the aim of provision for the future, - 'economy' is that complex of measures, which are caused by economic activity of an individual or of a human society.'<sup>149</sup> Exchange is defined: 'the peaceful appropriation, between several co-existing economies, finds its limits at the other political territory. The normal means of peaceful appropriation, which are in a foreign political territory, is thus only *exchange*; that means, the rewarded transaction of commodities, between the single economies.'<sup>150</sup> What constitutes fairness in exchange is explained with the marginal utility theory, fashionable at the time.<sup>151</sup> According to Weber, modern capitalism, though, is distinct from antiquity because of its level of rationalisation. This is not to say that antiquity lacked any kind of economic rationalisation. One might even argue that the ancient commitment to human goods in their social ethics demands a higher amount of

<sup>147</sup> *GVAN* p. 29 Book I - The terminological foundations of Political Economy § The Economy and its elemental characteristics.

<sup>148</sup> We translated *'Bedürfnisse'* as needs not as wants, since this is in line of Weber's later definition of *'Bedürfnis'*. See also *GVAN* pp. 32-33 for a discussion of the concept of 'economic good'.

<sup>149</sup> *GVAN* vol. I.6.b p. 35.

<sup>150</sup> *GVAN* vol. I.6.b p. 40.

<sup>151</sup> We need to take into account that theories of marginal utility have replaced the Aristotelian concept of use value, measuring the usefulness of a commodity in terms of its purchasing power at the market, which is external to it, this causes an additional problem for Weber.

rationalisation than any profit-making activity. There is even evidence to suggest that the Romans employed a higher rationality with respect to economic matters than the Greeks. For example, 'when a Greek city required credit or leased public land or let a contract for surplus, it was forced to incite competition amongst speculators.' According to Weber, Rome in contrast was in possession of a rational capitalistic class, which played a restraining role on the state. The capitalists of this class were, however, entirely dependent on the state and the favouritism of governmental institutions, in the leasing of the *ager publicus* or conquered land, and of domain land, or of tax farming and the financing of political adventures and of war. Those activities influenced the public policy of Rome in a decisive way at times, although it had to make concessions to the constant interference of the official nobility.<sup>152</sup>

Weber summarises the features of ancient capitalism in comparison with the characteristics of modern capitalism and concludes that 'we are faced in widely separated periods with a multiplicity of non-rational forms of capitalism. These include first, capitalistic enterprise for the purpose of tax farming...and the purpose of financing war...second, capitalism in connection with trade speculation, the trader being entirely absent in almost no epoch of history; third, money-lending capitalism, exploiting the necessities of outsiders.'<sup>153</sup> All those forms of capitalism relate to spoils, taxes, the benefits in holding office, and finally to tribute and actual need.<sup>154</sup> Profit making is defined as seeking continuous and recursive power over goods.<sup>155</sup>

The implications for Weber's definition of 'ancient capitalism' are thereby clear. Only where one city-state or nation trades commodities with another one, do we find 'exchange'. The household and the village community do not engage in exchange in an economic way. If the combined purposes of all individuals were simply geared towards a collective purpose in a city, according to Weber's definition, exchange would not have taken place in the *polis*. This is a surprising result. We discussed earlier Meyer's and Beloch's arguments against Bücher 'closed household economy'. Meyer's and Beloch's understanding of exchange seemed to be different from the way Weber defined it as taking place in modern capitalism. Meyer and Beloch saw any kind of commodity exchange or trade for profit on a larger scale as bearing resemblance to modern economic trade. According to Weber, capitalism on a national and institutionalised scale did not take place

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<sup>152</sup> Weber (1961) p. 247.

<sup>153</sup> *WG* p. 165.

<sup>154</sup> Weber (1961) p. 246-47.

in antiquity. By 'exchange as an institution', Weber outlines clearly that such an exchange is different from that in the isolated rural economies. An exchange economy evolves with the expansion of commodity exchange and the rewarded interchange of these goods between different communities. Paragraph 3 in the *GVAN* helps us to finalise our analysis of ancient capitalism. Weber differentiates the *Volkswirtschaft* 'national economy' from the previous economies. '*Volkswirtschaft*, in a strict sense, is the one which is regulated by exchange. The satisfaction of needs is achieved on the territory of a nation.'<sup>156</sup> Also worth noting is Weber's claim that all previous and also all communist social organisations have in common that they only deal with items of *use value* and produce only those.<sup>157</sup> However, the later clarifications of the definitions do not achieve their end. It is, for example, difficult to see where the so-called '*a posteriori*' difference between the modern economies and the ancient economies lies, if it is simply a question of emphasis on self-sufficiency versus exchange. Those who look for an absolutely precise answer in Weber's separation in the definition of exchange and the characteristics between ancient and modern capitalism look perhaps in vain. It is also unclear why Weber, in the *Agrarian Sociology*, admits the existence of 'ancient capitalism', but denies that capitalist activity can take place outside a national economy.<sup>158</sup> If there is no exchange on a national scale i.e. any *Volkswirtschaft*, how could there be capitalism in antiquity at all? A solution to this conceptual problem was not put forward by Weber. Could a definition of capitalism be delivered, which would accommodate the problem of defining the ancient economy in its different stages or eras with adequate historical concepts, or secondly, if there would be a consensus over what we could call capitalist activity or behaviour or agency, the Bücher-Meyer Controversy could have been resolved by Weber. Weber's definition of modern capitalism does not emphasise the unifying character of capital as Marx previously did.<sup>159</sup> However, Weber used the term institutionalised capitalism. What he probably meant by ancient capitalism was existence of exploited wage and state-administrated trade, a kind of *political capitalism*, which he later called imperialism.<sup>160</sup>

Taxes, mobile capital (mainly money), exploitation and a class structure are for most sociologists, economists and philosophers even in our days sufficient indicators to speak of capitalism in antiquity. Again the *telos* or purpose of the political institutions in

<sup>155</sup> *WG* p. 61.

<sup>156</sup> *GVAN* p. 43.

<sup>157</sup> *GVAN* p. 42.

<sup>158</sup> *WG* p. 651.

<sup>159</sup> See in particular *Cap.* I.1.i.

antiquity was different from the market and profit bound orientation of modern political and economic institutions, if we should believe Marx. A similar problem exists with the definition of ancient imperialism, since its modern form was clearly associated with a governmental goal for economic strength and gains. If one is happy to call the expansionist character of Roman politics towards its neighbouring communities imperialistic behaviour of the state, then imperialistic tendencies may indeed have had their significance in antiquity. The First Attic Maritime Trust of 422 BC is perhaps a good example of this.<sup>161</sup> However, suppression and exploitation as well as money and commodity exchange are not peculiar to capitalism alone. Weber therefore made a mistake, which gave some ground for the unfortunate misinterpretation of identifying his stance as a so called 'middle position' in the Bücher-Meyer Controversy. That such a reading of Weber is doubtful, if not strongly over-simplified, has been shown.<sup>162</sup>

Finally, let us discuss briefly what someone may call 'capitalist activity' in antiquity. It is possibly correct that in antiquity landed property was used as a source of income rather than profit making through enterprise. This however does not really solve the problem of the possibility of an *agrarian capitalism* or *socialism*. One could suggest that Weber wanted us to believe that ancient capitalism had some features in common with modern capitalism. However, that money lending existed, that profits were made out of speculation, that people were exploited for the purpose of wealth and power is clearly not unique to antiquity and not to capitalism either. Even ancient Egypt knew forms of private property.<sup>163</sup> Or should we rather say that anyone, who exploits or speculates, trades and produces for the sole purpose of money is a capitalist? Then 'capitalist activity' would not be dependant on a specific capitalist environment or society geared towards profit maximisation. This would lead us to the conclusion that what characterises a society is not 'simply' defined by its innate purpose or end, but by the sum of the activities of its individuals and their goals, which find their reflection in an added up purpose of its political and social institutions. Thus, there would be no space for a teleological understanding of society apart from piled up individual preferences and desires. Such an understanding has links to John Stuart Mill's empirical concept of society and economy.<sup>164</sup>

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<sup>160</sup> WG p. 524 ff.

<sup>161</sup> Heuss (1965) p. 547 and Weber in WG p. 625 and RA p. 130f.

<sup>162</sup> Deininger (1990) p. 144.

<sup>163</sup> Weber was one of the first scholars who acknowledged that fact see Weber (1988) p. 110 f.

<sup>164</sup> See Alan Ryan 'Mill and Weber on History freedom and reason' in Mommsen (1987) p. 59.

Secondly, and we have focused on this point before, a discussion about the exact proportion of capitalism in antiquity and capitalist activity has not been delivered by Weber. If ancient capitalism existed in some form, was it significant, typical or characteristic for the ancient world? If so, how significant were these forms? The connivance, toleration and occasional exploitation of private enterprise and 'capitalist activity' served a purpose, the enforcement of a certain political order or enabled expansionist or defence warfare. 'Capitalist activity' could also not have arisen as a counterpart against politics, according to Weber's model. Weber's analysis arrives eventually at a concept of ancient imperialism, which itself is a misleading concept too. Although Weber can perhaps escape the problem of a 'capitalist activity' without capitalism, modern imperialism did not only use the commercial powers for its political ends, but, as Weber also occasionally acknowledged, paved the way for capitalistic activity in general. It encouraged commerce, even if it hampered it unintentionally. However, on the other hand, Weber points out too that 'by no means all profit-making enterprise with capital accounting are doubly orientated to the market and sell their product or final services there. Tax farming and all sorts of financial operations have been carried on with capital accounting, but without selling any products....It is a case of capitalist profit-making which is not orientated to the market.'<sup>165</sup> 'Tax farming is capitalist because it is a form of profit-making involving the operation of organisation (*'societates publicatorum'*), which utilised calculations in terms of capital.'<sup>166</sup> A state that collects money taxes by tax farming is a favourable environment for the development of political orientated capitalism, but it does not encourage the orientation of profit-making activity towards the market. The granting of rights to benefactors and the give-away of landed property as public honours, tend to hinder the development of [market] capitalism by creating vested interest in the maintenance of existing sources of fees and contributions.<sup>167</sup>

According to Weber the distinctiveness of ancient capitalism is shown very clearly in the legal institutions involved. 'The significance of the essentially political basis of ancient capitalism is indicated by the fact that those legal institutions that were lacking for private business were recognised already in the private law of the early Empire with respect to publicans (*socii vectigalium publicanorum*), i.e. groups of private businessmen

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<sup>165</sup> WG p. 99.

<sup>166</sup> Love (1991) p. 50.

<sup>167</sup> WG p. 199.

to whom the state farmed out the levying taxes and the exploitation of the state owned mines and salt works.’<sup>168</sup>

Heuss pointed out correctly that Weber was aware of the danger that his account would not eliminate the creation of parallels and analogies between the modern and ancient ‘forms of economy’<sup>169</sup> In Weber, Heuss argued, we are dealing with political capitalism as opposed to industrial capitalism. The latter form could never have occurred in antiquity, since the ancient large-scale factory consisted rather of an occasional merger of workforce for seasonal duration. The large-scale factory or production units consisted simply of a combination of traditional forms of production, which did not constitute a new quality in the economic landscape and the ‘economic’ logic of antiquity. ‘Ancient capitalism did not know standing capital as Weber calls it.’<sup>170</sup> ‘There is no distinct and associated craftsmanship, which would make them a separated and distinct class.’ *Demiorgos* does not describe such a professional type or status. The ‘guilds’ do not exist and therefore no corporate interests of classes of producers. This is, however, not to say that Weber ignored the societies and association.

Although, Heuss’ observation might be correct, this does not solve the problem of the usage of the term ancient capitalism. Marx believed that capitalism only operates efficiently if the logic of the market economy would merge into and political superstructure of society and would continue to dominate it from there. If the economic basis does not exist in the first place, how could one call a system capitalist if it does not operate according to the rationale of the market economy, to produce and exchange commodities for profit? If there is a dialectical relation between economic base and political superstructure, as Weber seemed to have acknowledged, he should have denied the existence of capitalism in antiquity all together. Now, is this to say that there are no parallels between modernity and antiquity? Is this to say that we cannot learn anything from the social problems of the ancients? Weber’s definition of ancient capitalism does not constitute a ‘genuine capitalism’ similar to the modern phenomenon, since it lacks the plain existence of the mass markets, rational organisation and extensive division of labour. It also lacks the technological innovation which is characteristic of modern times (in the form of intensifying labour or improving efficiency).<sup>171</sup> However, for Weber technological

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<sup>168</sup> WG p. 710.

<sup>169</sup> Heuss (1965) p. 541.

<sup>170</sup> See Heuss (1965) p. 541.

<sup>171</sup> See Love (1991) p. 43.

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advances alone do not create large-scale industry. It is rather their commercial usage and marketability that encourages such a development.

## *Résumé*

Weber's contribution towards a conceptualised ancient economic history, the course of social development, his influence on political thinkers, philosophers, historians and other social scientist is vast and comments and reflections of his works are almost countless. However, despite the fact that Weber's material on ancient economic history covers probably enough ground for several doctoral theses, for some reason it has yet to gain the level in popularity compared to his well documented and widely appreciated sociological writings. Perhaps the ongoing dispute in historical studies as to whether the historical or cultural sciences should maintain a distinct methodology as compared to the physical or empirical sciences, has had a negative effect on the reception of Weber's writings on the ancient economy history. Austin and Vidal-Naquet acknowledged though that after Bücher and Meyer, apparently 'a fresh start was needed to emerge from the impasse, and the credit belongs to the great German sociologist Max Weber for the initiative which led to a better understanding of the position held by the economy in Greek history.'<sup>172</sup> Their analysis of Weber's arguments, however, almost ends with this short praise.

What remains is to discuss whether Weber's effort to find a solution to the controversy formed only a mediating or middle position to the Controversy. Pearson for example, asserted that 'it can hardly be said, however, that Weber resolved the issues in this secular debate, for while he sketched in the outlines of a new approach, he did not provide the conceptual tools with which to answer specific questions like trade organisations, money use, and methods of exchange.'<sup>173</sup> We have noted that Weber's conceptual tool was the ideal-type and a neo-Kantian understanding of 'rational agency', and he therefore aimed to supersede the debate by identifying the methodological problems in both Bücher's and Meyer's theories. Although Weber's use of the term ancient capitalism makes him look as simply compromising between both positions, his conceptualisation of the ancient economy as a 'city', 'slave' and 'coastal culture' identifies this economy as clearly separate from modern capitalism. Recently, Mazza highlighted positively that 'what he [Weber] has certainly achieved, was to break down the old-fashioned views and frameworks that characterised the debate between primitivism vs.

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<sup>172</sup> See Austin and Vidal-Naquet (1977) p. 3.

<sup>173</sup> See Pearson (1956) p. 7.

modernism.<sup>174</sup> We only have to add here, as we have seen from the discussion in Part I, that such a distinction or classification of Bücher's and Meyer's position forms an oversimplification in the first place. Recently, John R. Love praised 'Weber's mature approach that avoids the extremes of both excessive "primitivism" as well as anachronistic "modernism".'<sup>175</sup> The author seems to have ignored the fact that Weber's own position rather critically absorbed and superseded both Bücher's and Meyer's approach.

Weber's complex alternative characterisation of 'ancient capitalism' in antiquity is problematic and gave rise to criticism by Johannes Hasebroek and Michael I. Rostovtzeff. However, Alfred Heuss noted correctly a hundred years [1965] after Weber's birth, an exact analysis of Weber's prepositions in economic history has not yet been conducted by the 'specialists'.<sup>176</sup> The academic discipline of ancient history seemed to have carried on regardless of Weber's works - a concern repeated by Finley in 1980.<sup>177</sup> Nowadays, apart from a few exceptions, many ancient or economic historians seem to be eager to make renewed fresh starts and reflect on Weber's attempt to find a solution to the old debate in a few paragraphs in their introduction overlooking the comprehensiveness of Weber's discussion of historical concept formation and economic rationality. It seems that Alfred Heuss is still correct in claiming 'that ancient history as an academic discipline went its own way, as if Weber had never lived.'<sup>178</sup> The integration of Weber's works in ancient history has yet to happen. The continuing work on the *MWG* by Alexander Demandt and Jürgen Deininger is certainly both pioneering and groundbreaking.

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<sup>174</sup> Mazza (1984) p. 538.

<sup>175</sup> Love (1991) p. 55.

<sup>176</sup> See Heuss (1965) p. 554.

<sup>177</sup> See Finley (1980) p.20.

<sup>178</sup> Heuss (1965) p. 554.

## 2. The Aftermath and Reflection on the Controversy in Contemporary Literature

### *Introduction*

In January 1919 Max Weber presented a paper entitled 'Science as a Vocation' ('*Vom Inneren Beruf zur Wissenschaft*') in Munich.<sup>179</sup> His words were passionate, which in a way, reflected the revolutionary spirit in Germany at that time - merely a month before Walter Rathenau would proclaim the '*Räterepublik*'. Weber argued against the irresponsible and half-thought out demands by revolutionaries for 'a kingdom of love, beauty and reason.'<sup>180</sup> Politics, Weber claimed, is swamped by such demands, which are not its office. Karl Löwith, who listened to Weber's paper, regarded his words 'as a relief after all the polemic quarrels and revolutionary speeches of liberal activists.' 'At first glance, his paper is about the ethos of the sciences. In the heart of the matter, Weber tried to answer the question, how the desire for a meaningful life can still be possible in the *iron cage* of the "rationalising" civilisation.'<sup>181</sup> He emphasised that even though science can provide us with powerful tools, that even if it can be a means to fulfil our ambitions, it does not answer any fundamental existential question. It cannot answer any of Tolstoy's questions, 'how should we live?' It seems that philosophers and historians were unable to provide an alternative to this modernist faith into science and technological advances.

Many ancient historians tried to raise the profile of their discipline by making anachronistic comparisons between present and past, between historical personality as well as events. Historians such as Oertel and Rostovtzeff were certainly not amongst such academic charlatans, but their works show a clear influence of the anachronistic reading of history during the 1920s, and with regard to Meyer, almost apocalyptic comparisons between antiquity and modern Europe in his later and mostly political writings.<sup>182</sup> As we have seen, such analogies had a long and prominent tradition going back to the 18th century. That this tradition was able to continue with anachronistic comparisons was at

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<sup>179</sup> *MWG* vol. I.17.

<sup>180</sup> See Safranski (1995) p 113 f.

<sup>181</sup> Safranski (1995) p. 113 ff.

<sup>182</sup> See the discussion Part I.2.v.

least partly due to the political and intellectual climate in Germany during the 1920s and early 1930s.

Significant for this time and age was also Oswald Spengler's *'Untergang des Abendlandes'* ('The Downfall of the Occident'), which reached a publication rate of over 600,000 copies in first edition.<sup>183</sup> Other visions of the future reached inflationary proportions at a previously unheard of rate, and offered everyone with a loud voice and demagogic promises a modest income and even lucrative political positions. Messianic proclamations and philosophies flooded the political spectrum from the Left to the Right like *Reichsmark* notes. Toller and Mühsam, both part of the *Räterepublik* in Munich, enacted a bill in order to transmute the world into 'a meadow of flowers'. Hierarchy and jurisdiction were abolished and newspapers were obliged to print poems of Hölderlin and Schiller, Goethe and Herder. Weber's appeal for an ideological caution in philosophy and historical studies did not fit into the desires of the time. Eduard Spranger, full of enthusiasm, said that 'Religiously... expects the young generation its deepest rebirth.... The young human being breathes and lives more than ever before by his totality of his spiritual organs.... There is an instinct of *polity*. And at the same time religious craving; a fumbling back from artificial and mechanical circumstances into the everlasting welling metaphysical.'<sup>184</sup> The glorification of the past accompanied with the fears of the repetitive character of history, brought philosophers like Nietzsche with his critique of modernity and affiliation with ancient virtue ethics as well as the whole subject of the course and fate of antiquity into a very new and important perspective.

On the other hand, there were revolutionary theories developed from the Leninist interpretation of Marxism. Not only messianic missionaries appear occur during the 1920s and also 30s, but also Marxism was regarded as a strong radical political force willing to become, with the theoretical contributions of Lenin, an applicable and positive theory for a new society. It should be noted, however, that Marxism was never an intellectual force at German universities before 1945. It rather gained its strength politically with the October Revolution, the German Revolution of 1918/19 and Rathenau's Munich Republic.

The political and economic 'ups' and 'downs' of the 1920s could not possibly leave any intelligent person untouched. However, care should be exercised not to interpret Oertel, Hasebroek and Rostovtzeff's approaches towards the Bücher-Meyer Controversy as being entirely ideological motivated or triggered by politics. Ancient historians did not

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<sup>183</sup> See Demandt (1998) p. 84.

<sup>184</sup> Safranski (1995) p. 117.

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live a separate and solitary life away from the fast moving social and political affairs during the 1920s. Quite the opposite, their works are to a considerable degree reflections of modern political and economic problems.<sup>185</sup>

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<sup>185</sup> For a very profound read on the situation in *Altertumswissenschaft* as a whole during the 1920s see Flashar (1995).

*i. Use or Abuse of Ancient History during the 1920s and 30s*

Ancient Greek and Roman history were strongly influenced by the discussion about the character of the ancient economy. The debate between Bücher and Meyer brought to light not only an initially perhaps fairly minor and subject specific issue, that of the character of the ancient economy, but quickly involved the whole complexity of political, social and cultural as well as methodological problems of historical studies and its position during the turbulent events to come during the 1920s and early 1930s. Bücher and Meyer were therefore only the initiators of the dispute. Their extreme positions and the variety of issues they touched began to fascinate a large number of scholars who felt obliged to comment and add to the issues. This became particularly apparent during the 1920s and 30s.

Recently Ines Stahlmann, Beat Näf and Andreas Wittenberg have all separately addressed the situation of *Altertumswissenschaft* (ancient history) during the 1920s.<sup>186</sup> Their investigations show a common opinion on the significance of the efforts of ancient historians of that time to use the subject of Greek and Roman history in many ways in order to address modern political problems and highlighted the continuing educational value of the academic discipline for the upbringing and edification of the young German citizen.

By concentrating on aspects relevant for the continuity of the Bücher-Meyer Controversy we hope to clarify that the characteristics of ancient political and economic life are seriously important for answering the challenges of the post World War I period. Näf pointed out recently that ‘self-evidently, one frequently draw parallels between antiquity and German history’<sup>187</sup> during the 1920. There is of course nothing self-explanatory about this, but our discussion in Part I and II support this observation. The main characteristic was a general nationalistic undertone, which came primarily from the tradition of the Prussian School in historical studies. The engagement with current political issues by ancient historians had mainly two reasons. On the one hand, these scholars aimed to demonstrate that ancient history and the whole of *Altertumswissenschaften* was capable of maintaining an indispensable key importance in secondary and higher education by being essential for the education of the ‘young state

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<sup>186</sup> See Flashar (1995) table of contents and references below.

<sup>187</sup> Näf in Flashar (1995) p. 282 f.

citizen' ('*Staatsbürger*').<sup>188</sup> On the other hand the traditional historiography, which still held an influential position at most German universities, aimed to position itself against rival approaches from the new social sciences and economic history. Politically, the Versailles treaty and the ongoing political and social problems, as well as the rise of the organised communist and nationalist front in Germany, made even Jewish historians like Viktor Ehrenberg put up with ideas of the *Germania triumphans*.<sup>189</sup> Apart from the socialist historian, Arthur Rosenberg and perhaps the political economists Bernard Laum and Edgar Salin as well as the ancient historian Johannes Hasebroek, the majority of the German historians regarded themselves as 'the guardian of the holy fire on the altars of the past.'<sup>190</sup> Most ancient historians regarded it as their political duty to make ancient history accessible and applicable to modern problems. This is not to say that analogies between ancient and modern times were used in an utterly arbitrary manner. However, the political polarisation of Germany during the 1920s, the practical incompetence of the 'Weimar administration' and the restrictions posed by the Versailles treaty, combined with the largely conservative Rankean tradition, resulted in an even stronger and less selective attitude towards analogies between the modern and ancient world.<sup>191</sup>

Due to the predominant scholarly influence of the works of Droysen, Nietzsche, Burckhardt, Beloch, Pöhlmann and Eduard Meyer, it was common for ancient historians to address questions in the field of history and theory. Their works have influenced and shaped the discussions of the 1920s. Although the calls for a reorientation of historical studies became more articulate, a significant methodological break with historicism was not forthcoming.

Politically, in the aftermath of World War I, the 'national question' of Germany and its place as an imperial power in the world still remained unsolved.<sup>192</sup> The discussions at the German Historian Conferences during these years clearly indicate a continuity of the historicism debates in historical studies, classics, political economy and philosophy. This allowed the previously modernising views of periods, and aspects of the ancient world antiquity, to be perpetuated and to be partially reasserted.<sup>193</sup> This posed a serious difficulty for Hasebroek, Laum and Salin in gathering support for their stance. Even if the younger

<sup>188</sup> The concept of the '*Staatsbürger*' was coined to emphasise the link between individual civic rights and public duties in particular the duty to be obedient to the state and to follow its laws and patriotic demands. See Meyer (1918), Ehrenberg (1923) and Lenschau (1932).

<sup>189</sup> Näf in Flashar (1995) p. 282 n6 and the letter of Ehrenberg to Eduard Meyer 1/10/1919.

<sup>190</sup> See in particular Kahrstedt (1921) 'The duties of the historian in the new Germany' p. 708

<sup>191</sup> See Below (1926) See Münzer (1925) 'The legacy of the ancients' p. 9.

<sup>192</sup> See Fischer (1961).

generations of ancient historians, like Oertel and Erb, criticised the totality of the Rankean paradigm, a fresh start was never made during that time. As indicated in Part II, positivism enjoyed increasing support amongst political economists, but their views were continuously rejected by the historicist historiography, which did not help to resolve the methodological and often ideological differences between these scholars' views. However, some direct criticism was voiced against Meyer's 'one-sidedness' and Beloch's lack of 'historical *couleur*'<sup>194</sup> However, in 1932 Erich Stier noted that the '1920s were a period of quest and of experiment in all areas of life', and added that 'one does not err if one identifies dismay and desperation as the characteristics of that time, but somehow trust in the intellectual work of the past generation slowly reappeared'.<sup>195</sup> Since the largely historicist methodology remained the predominant conceptual framework, with the intellectual public turning its interest towards antiquity again, ancient history was not urged to rethink the theoretical foundations of its discipline during the 1920s. Also, the *Lamprechtstreit* left the historicist framework within ancient and modern history largely intact due to the unacceptable weaknesses in Lamprecht's approach. As Näf has pointed out, during the 1920s ancient history maintained its tendency towards making historical generalisations and to increasing the degree of specialisation within the discipline, but also attempted to utilise the results of ancient history in an apparently new way 'in order to highlight the "purpose and importance" of ancient Greek history'.<sup>196</sup> For example, Ulrich Wilcken characterised the history of Hellas as possessing an extremely crucial place in world history.<sup>197</sup> The same applies of course to the importance of ancient history for the humanistic education of the modern citizen. Almost similar to Pöhlmann's critique against attempts to diminish the influence of ancient history, Mattias Gelzer noted in 1926: 'As it appears to me, ancient studies [*Alttertumswissenschaft*'] today have to face two tasks. On the one hand, it should serve the humanistic edification, that is to say, it should preserve the most indispensable values for the present, which the older and later humanism rediscovered for our culture. On the other hand, the historical sciences should represent a

<sup>193</sup> See Schumann (1974) p 180.

<sup>194</sup> See Gelzer (1930) p. 624 and Berve (1928) p. 479. See Näf (1995) p. 284 n21 ff.

<sup>195</sup> Näf in Flashar (1995) p. 285 n23 Cf. Stier (1932) p. 28.

<sup>196</sup> Näf in Flashar (1995) p. 285. In this context Näf highlighted the previous modernisation in ancient history and unjustly equated Wilamowitz-Möllendorf with Beloch, Pöhlmann and Meyer. Although Wilamowitz made references to political problems of his time, straight analogies between antiquity and modernity could not be detected. See Wilamowitz (1893) vol 1. 'Analysis of Aristotle's Politics and its literature'..

<sup>197</sup> See Wilcken (1926) p. 1 and Otto (1925) p. 69f. n26.

colossal piece of human history, which is called antiquity, in its entirety.’<sup>198</sup> This was a large burden of responsibility for ancient historians. Max Pohlenz’s paper ‘about the education of the citizen in Greek school lessons’ exemplifies in a very precise way the political importance of the classical education of the youth.<sup>199</sup> ‘That the political sense of our boys is strengthened, if they engage in the spirit of the good times of the Greek *polis*, does not need to be emphasised.’<sup>200</sup> Clearly, Pohlenz advocates a selective study of the classics, by picking and choosing the progressive and stable elements during the Greek antiquity. However, the object of such a methodology was not to encourage a uniform understanding of the Greek *polis*, but to sharpen the understanding of students for issues in the relationship between state-citizen and society.<sup>201</sup>

The interpretation of a historically uniform Greek *polis* is mainly found in Viktor Ehrenberg’s interpretation. The interest in the political foundations of the *polis* and its importance for a modern period is, as we saw, not unique to the 1920s. In the light of Meyer’s and Beloch’s stance one might already speak of a tradition of modernising the Greek *polis* against the aims and conflicts of the Weimar Republic. The search for the meaning of history and the mission of the German nation was subject to often intense debate from the early 1920s onwards until the end of the Second World War. The ‘*Sinn*’ or meaning of ancient Greek and Roman history was for many German historians always related to the fate of the German nation.<sup>202</sup> The use of ancient history and the emphasis on its political structure, ethos and anthropological presuppositions involved economic history mainly only within this political framework.<sup>203</sup>

This is of course not to say that the utilisation of ancient history led inevitably to a uniform school of thought within *Alttertumswissenschaft*. A good example of the variety of views within ancient history as an academic discipline is Hans Schaefer who highlighted the non-utilitarian character of the Greek ethos, where material competition was seen as a expressions of manhood, but not for money’s sake. Schaefer argued that Greek ethics, which were largely based on virtues, dominated all other aspects of life including the economy.<sup>204</sup> In fact, for Schaefer, it was the shift away from these virtues and the encouragement of egoism, which led to the political and economic disintegration of the

<sup>198</sup> See Gelzer (1927) p. 185 ff.

<sup>199</sup> See Meyer (1918), Ehrenberg (1923) and Lenschau (1932).

<sup>200</sup> Näf in Flashar (1995) p. 289 n35, n36.

<sup>201</sup> We need to note here that since Weber the notion of society as opposed to ‘state’ had taken a more central role in the pedagogic jargon.

<sup>202</sup> See Ehrenberg (1923) p. 378.

<sup>203</sup> See for example Jaeger’s ‘The Education of the Greek Man’ (1934) vol. I p. 16 f. n1

ancient *polis*.<sup>205</sup> The use of ancient history in all its aspects to answer questions of the present was continued throughout the 1930s and still enjoys popularity today.<sup>206</sup>

A further development in ancient history during the 1920s and 30s was the popular attention given to the economic and legal history of antiquity. As we shall see in the following section, Oertel's modernising position, enhanced Beloch, Meyer and Pöhlmann's views. However, his stance did not remain unchallenged. Johannes Hasebroek especially tried to revive and enrich the declining view of the none-modern character of the pre-Hellenic ancient 'economy'. Examined in the context of the challenges and the rapidly changing social environment, ancient history regained importance as an academic discipline and as an essential tool in secondary education. That the German culture during this period 'aimed for new creativity and livelihood' and that this new spirit was 'certainly not due to the participation of the ancient historians' signals for Stahlmann that only the progressive liberal attitude was capable of encouraging changes. However, even if the political views of the elite of ancient historians were dominated by obvious national-conservative sympathies, it should be pointed out that lively debate and opposing views were not rare.<sup>207</sup> An example is the aftermath of the Bücher-Meyer Controversy with the contributions of the more conservative Michael Rostovtzeff and the liberal Johannes Hasebroek.

One of the most extreme and embarrassing expressions of the calls for a revival of Classical antiquity by an ancient historian can perhaps be found in Walter Otto's call for a new '*Führer*': 'immense labour, labour more than anything else is required of us. Bitterly needed is also a regeneration of the spirit, which only religion is capable of providing. We also need a leader, not one of the many, who were created by pernicious personal cults, but the great all-conquering people's hero. Will he be created by the revolution like Cromwell and Napoleon, will he be its accomplisher and superseder? Or will we still need to wait for the saviour for a long time to come?'<sup>208</sup> Ringer pointed out that in the aftermath of World War I, it was especially the intellectuals who felt themselves to be haunted by a 'ghost of a soulless modernity' and predicted a 'cultural crisis' or a decline of education, values and the national spirit in general.<sup>209</sup> Stahlmann argues that the impression of living in an age of

<sup>204</sup> Especially this idea was later picked up by Polanyi and partly adopted by Finley.

<sup>205</sup> Näf in Flashar (1995) p. 293.

<sup>206</sup> Losemann (1977).

<sup>207</sup> See Stahlmann in Flashar (1995) p. 304 n2, relies on a remark by Christ (1981) vol. 1, p. 160.

<sup>208</sup> Otto (1919) p. 86 cited in Stahlmann (1995) p. 304 n5. For more detail on the political commitments of German academics see Ringer (1990) and Faulenbach (1980).

<sup>209</sup> Stahlmann in Flashar (1995) p. 307.

decline triggered the ancient historians to turn their attention to similar problems in antiquity. The study of subjects such as the downfall of the Roman Empire were however not peculiar to the 1920s. As we have seen before, Weber, Meyer, Pöhlmann and Beloch had already worked towards the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century on similar and influential papers. To them it may have been the educational goals of the Willhelmanian era or the threat of positivism or the challenges of understanding modern economic and technological phenomena, which led them to inquire into the field of the decline of the ancient civilisation.

The devastating political and economic results of World War I for Germany and Europe raised fundamental and existential questions for the German nation that were not resolved during the 1920s. It is not surprising that historians looked for examples in the past, which constitute similar existential fears of decline of a civilisation. This presupposes that one regards the possibility of drawing historical analogies as a completely legitimate tool. Although the subject of the decline of the ancient civilisations only started to be researched before World War I, Oswald Spengler's *Der Untergang des Abendlandes*, Ernst Stein's *Geschichte des Spätromischen Reiches* and Matias Glezer's *'Alttertumswissenschaft und Spätantike'* continued the search for explanations about this dramatic phenomenon. Gelzer, for example, saw the main cause of decline in the increasingly unmanageable amount of bureaucracy, which during the late Roman Empire apparently amounted to forms of 'state socialism', similar to the way in which 'fascist' and 'Bolshevik' political constitutions subsume and destroy the individual.<sup>210</sup> Although Gelzer was well aware of the dangers of uncritical comparisons and analogies between antiquity and modern times, his statements represent a good example of the commonly held view about the importance of late antiquity for the political situation in Germany and Europe.<sup>211</sup>

The 'social' and 'national question' in Germany of the 1920s was not only the centre of attention for conventional political historians, but also attracted the attention of ancient historians such as Pöhlmann, Gelzer and Oertel. Gelzer called the 'social question' during the 1920 the most important problem of his time. He stated, 'the social question is very justifiably of fashionable interest in our days. The unlimited technological development of the last century did lead to tremendous changes in the area of trade and

<sup>210</sup> See Gelzer (1927) p. 177.

<sup>211</sup> For a good example see Gelzer's discussion of Pöhlmann's *Geschichte der Sozialen Frage und des Sozialismus in der Antiken Welt* in Gelzer (1914) pp. 102-106. Gelzer argued that Pöhlmann tried to brush aside 'the ancient tendencies a modern catch phrase in order to influence actively modern politics.' But we

industry, which brought about...entirely new forms of human social life....Over several hundred million people were hit by misery....Hence, it is no surprise that not one thinking mind in our days can distance himself from these problems.’<sup>212</sup> Clearly the majority of scholars in ancient history were, despite their conservative political orientation, not oblivious to contemporary social problems, but most maintained a sceptical attitude with regard to economic factors and their influence on politics. This became apparent through the discussion of the political situation and the legal organisation of Rome. It was claimed that ‘despite the increased popularity of economic history at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, especially in the area of ancient history, which clearly inspired a number of new publications in this field during the Weimar years, this period produced little of permanent value.’<sup>213</sup> The following chapters will show that this point has been misguided.

It was perhaps due the lack of political leadership and intellectual orientation that historical studies including ancient history focused on how particular historic personalities – the ‘great men’ of the past – managed politics in times of crises. There is no need to illustrate the conservative and nationalist attitude of modern and ancient historians who affiliated themselves with the spirit of anti-Semitism and fascism with its glorification of the Roman Empire.<sup>214</sup> Their work is not relevant for us. A good example of the continued utilisation of ancient history to sharpen the historical mind of the modern men is, however, Gelzer’s statement: ‘the purpose of historiography is to learn from the past. Understanding and judgement develops with the study of the great, cause and effect incorporating complex political affairs’.<sup>215</sup> The political fate of a nation is, according to Gelzer, strongly linked to the abilities of the statesman, such as a quick understanding of the complexity of particular political tendencies and political creativity to guide a nation into a new era. With this commonly supported agenda of historiography, ancient history as political event history and with the ‘analogy’ forming an essential tool in order to learn from the past, Meyer’s, and his supporters’, reading of the ancient economy remained the predominant view during the direct aftermath of the Bücher-Meyer Controversy.

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saw of course that the phrase “different times, different social questions” does not move us away from viewing ancient history as entirely separate and relativistic.

<sup>212</sup> Gelzer (1920) p. 154.

<sup>213</sup> Stahlmann in Flashar (1995) p. 324.

<sup>214</sup> For some examples see Stahlmann in Flashar (1995) p. 321 ff. The intense focus and glorification of the great leaders in history and the cult around certain historical thinkers and cultural treasures became also apparent in book series such as ‘Men who Made history’, ‘Fighters’ and ‘Master of Politics’. The philosophical ideas and achievements of Nietzsche fell also victim to this mystification of historic personalities. See in particular Anel-Pearson (1990) and Aschheim (1992).

<sup>215</sup> See Gelzer (1960) Quoted in Stahlmann in Flashar (1995) p. 321 n91

ii. *Friedrich Oertel and the 'Social Question' of Antiquity*

Although Friedrich Oertel is perhaps better known amongst ancient historians for his papyri studies, he published a great deal of essays and reviews on ancient economic thought and its literature. Most famous in that field is his appendix to Robert von Pöhlmann's *Geschichte der Sozialen Frage*. Oertel presented papers at the German Historian Conference in 1926 and continued to discuss issues corresponding to the outcome of the Bücher-Meyer Controversy. Nevertheless, comparisons and attempts to modernise ancient history are present in his works; regardless of all modesty Oertel stood firmly in the tradition of the historicist historiography of Meyer.<sup>216</sup> However, without Friedrich Oertel's appendix to Robert von Pöhlmann's *Geschichte der Sozialen Frage und des Sozialismus in der Antiken Welt* of 1925, the Bücher-Meyer Controversy would perhaps never reached the legacy that it has for contemporary writings in the history of historiography. The importance of Oertel's essay does not lie in the unique and precise interpretation of the issues debated between traditional ancient history and modern political economy; rather his essay aided the continuity of the debate.

Even if Oertel argued that capitalism existed in some form in antiquity, his analysis of capitalism is not an ode on this political system or the free market. Oertel claimed that 'There can be no doubt that a capitalist way of thinking and *operating* existed in antiquity.'<sup>217</sup> For Oertel such forms did not have to have a mass character on a large scale. Forms of ancient socialism and capitalism were always present. The act of lending and borrowing of slave labour elucidate capitalist rationality. 'The goldsmith acquired gold in order to produce jewellery for a ready market; Aristarchus, who took a loan because of Socrates' advice in order to buy woollen for his fortune female workers, acted in a capitalistic manner.'<sup>218</sup> What was valid for industry, for Oertel is simultaneously valid for agriculture.

Oertel clearly supported the views of the ancient historians against Bücher 'and recently also Salin', but acknowledged that many difficulties and misunderstandings are due to the definition of capitalism. Oertel himself suggests the division of the concept of

<sup>216</sup> Cf. Schumann (1974) for a discussion Gelzer's *Die Perioden der Griechischen Geschichte* and Oertel (1927)

<sup>217</sup> Oertel (1925) p. 514.

<sup>218</sup> Oertel (1925) p. 515.

capitalism into two aspects, a *wider* definition and a *narrower* definition.<sup>219</sup> Oertel maintained that on the basis of a money economy, the purpose of 'economic activity' ('*Erwerbsstrebens*') was the accumulation of assets. He argues that a capitalist mode of production existed with an impersonalised form of capital. The *kapitalistische Produktionsweise* does exist even on a small-scale in craftsmanship and in farming. By quoting Weber he claims that major and longer periods of antiquity operated in a capitalistic way and states that 'in particular socialism gained its character through the capitalist mode of production.' In order to elucidate such a development it is important for Oertel to address the question of the capitalist heavy industry. The question of the existence of heavy industry is not only a terminological problem, but also a question of the interpretation of the archaeological sources. Oertel, unlike Meyer, did not simply assume a kind of capitalist attitude of moneylenders and the workshop owners to make money, but assumes a highly developed capitalist national economy with centres of trade and exchange. In this light we should comprehend Oertel's summary of the Bücher-Meyer Controversy as only addressing the question of the scale of production and trade in antiquity:

'Are we to conceive the economy of antiquity as having reached a high level of development, or, on the contrary, as essentially primitive? Should the 5th and 4th century be regarded as an age of national and international business, a receding agriculture, an advancing industry, large scale manufacturing on capitalistic lines and growing in scope with factories working for export and competing for one another for sales in the world market? Or should we assume, on the contrary, that the stage of the closed household economy had not yet passed, that economic activity had not yet attained a national, even less an international scale, that no regular commerce involving long distance trading was carried out and that, consequently, no large-scale industry producing for foreign markets existed? In brief, was the character of economic life still agrarian or rather industrial? Was commerce still restricted to a peddling of particular wares, the work of craftsman producing without any aid of machinery and using the raw-materials that were locally available to them?'<sup>220</sup>

This often quoted summary exemplifies similarities, but also shows differences between Oertel's interpretation and other interpretations of the Controversy. We noted before, that the real difference between Bücher and Meyer lies in the historiographical

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<sup>219</sup> Oertel (1925) p. 516.

<sup>220</sup> Oertel (1925) p. 516-17.

method. Bücher was influenced by positivism and social democratic values, which welcomed the Smithian ideal of fair commutation in free markets. Bücher did not believe in the modern character of antiquity, since its economic complexity was more primitive (household based) in the development of human civilisation.<sup>221</sup> Meyer, by arguing that political history, and hence economic history, repeated itself, was in fact not modernising antiquity in order to justify the system of rising capitalism; rather he warned of the dangers of free market capitalism undermining the nation state. That he believed that there were some striking analogies between modern political situations and ancient epochs lies in the nature of the Rankean paradigm of the primary character of the guiding political ideas.

Oertel noted that the extreme positions ‘in the debate between Bücher and Beloch have been recently reaffirmed by both authors’. Oertel also noted the development of a *Mitteltheorie* or a ‘whole lot of middle theories’ by Weber, Francotte, Zimmern and Siegwart.<sup>222</sup> It is perhaps this statement that marks the beginning of a misinterpretation of Weber’s position as a mediator between Bücher and Meyer. Oertel’s interpretation seems to commit the error of interpreting the nature of the differences between Bücher and Meyer as merely a question of the quantity and scale of exchange. The fundamental question, how important trade and profit-making really were in antiquity, can only be properly addressed in the wider discussion of the nature of political life in antiquity. As Polanyi, Finley and recently Meikle have suggested, a system of capitalism could not have emerged in antiquity due to the lack of basic capitalist characteristics; the extraction of surplus in a free wage labour economy.<sup>223</sup> This implies of course that the artisan who worked for their wages had little impact on the economic constitution of the *polis*. Secondly, it is argued by those scholars that antiquity never developed institutions, laws, contracts and the necessary material and social condition for an economic system that are essential for the industrial and commercial development of modern Europe. The ‘negative’ theory of Bücher, Oertel argued further, was obviously opposed to the ‘positive’ theories of Meyer and Beloch.<sup>224</sup> The former was negative in respect of his denial of the interpretation that antiquity ever reached the stage of an economy operating on a national scale. Bücher continued to maintain the self-sufficient character of the classical period and would only allow that Athens was an exception to this. On the other hand, the ‘positive’ theory refers to a affirmation of modern structures in economic life, such as markets, industry and trade.

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<sup>221</sup> For the Darwinian evolutionist influence on Bücher see Leroy (1925).

<sup>222</sup> Oertel (1925) p. 517 Below (1926) p 11.

<sup>223</sup> Meikle (1995b) p. 161 f.

Oertel argued in agreement with Meyer that 'the Peloponnesian War, although though Thucydides remains silent about this, had a very significant economic-political importance.'<sup>225</sup> Besides the conjectural tendencies in this observation, what angers Oertel mostly is that Bücher seems to deny the import of raw materials for industrial production. However, Oertel's argument is inconclusive. 'The iron which the slaves processed for the father of Demosthenes into *μαχαίμαι* could hardly have been mined in Attika.'<sup>226</sup> Further, 'elephants which could produce the ivory for the handles of the *μαχαίμαι* did not live in Athens either'. As much as Bücher was unable to disprove the suggestion that industrial raw-material were imported, so was Oertel unable to refute the existence of the textile industry of Megara. Megara, with the evidence provided by Meyer and Beloch (after Xenophon and Isokrates), shows systematic production by the artisans for the purpose of trade and wealth creation. Most striking for Oertel is the appearance of amphorae in different parts of the ancient world clearly standing out as an important piece of evidence for an early ceramic industry developed on a large-scale. For Oertel there seemed to have been only one way 'how these amphorae of Athenian style could have existed in large numbers in Italy', and that was by the means of trade.<sup>227</sup> Bücher suggested that these were gifts. Even if Oertel is correct, that such large numbers of amphorae were not handed out as gifts, Bücher's claim of the travelling crafts or other alternatives of skilled imported slaves, has not even been mentioned or discussed by Oertel. Yet, after little more than two pages Oertel concludes, 'After all we can conclude that Bücher's extreme statements cannot withstand scrutiny.' And further, 'Attika remains as Pöhlmann and others have maintained, an outstanding example of the ancient economy; raw-material has not only been imported for shipbuilding; the existence of an industry working also for export is difficult to deny.'<sup>228</sup> Although Oertel notes that an identity of an economy is not warranted by such a fact, yet he concludes (not without some criticism of Beloch's statistics, which made conjectures about the GDP of Athens and the money value of the Drachmae compared with the Reichsmark), that 'Beloch hit approximately the correct numbers, but that there are errors which Beloch himself recently admitted.'<sup>229</sup>

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<sup>224</sup> Oertel (1925) 517

<sup>225</sup> Romstedt (1914) p. 47 ff. and Oertel (1925) p. 519

<sup>226</sup> Oertel (1925) p. 519.

<sup>227</sup> Oertel (1925) p. 520.

<sup>228</sup> Oertel (1925) p. 520.

<sup>229</sup> Oertel (1925) p. 521.

However, Oertel turned also critically against Meyer and Pöhlmann who both, in his view, exaggerated the scope and scale of production and trade. He points out that the 'plant based production' might have been smaller than initially assumed.<sup>230</sup> Whether we should take the number of slaves into account by calculating the gross domestic product is not relevant for the understanding of Oertel's position. To him, commerce was of course present, but the scope of trade and commerce was strongly limited to technical and natural resources. As for the 4<sup>th</sup> century, Oertel pointed out the lack of food i.e. the need to import nutrition forced Athens to produce goods for export. Oertel stated that 'already Solon acknowledged this. However, if this fact is rather disputable, then it is even more doubtful that the conditions existed for a factory based large-scale industry.'<sup>231</sup> Oertel notes too for the pre-Hellenic period that the transport of goods, especially between the country towns, was often very difficult mainly because of the customs bans but also due to sea robbery.<sup>232</sup> The premium for success must have been very high indeed, and any insurance according to Oertel was very expensive in interest rates. A competitive transport fleet could not develop because the small ships were unable to travel during winter time. With interest rates, according to Oertel's estimates, ranging between 14 % and 27 % commercial transport was expensive and dangerous, which is for Oertel a good reason to assume that international competition between different cities for markets could not emerge. In addition, it is difficult to imagine how much mass-produce was needed since there was little information exchange between the cities, especially during the winter time. This also meant that travelling for business or other purposes was rather rare. Whilst the import of raw material was, because of scarcity, rather welcomed, the export of goods was in comparison quite difficult. Since a functioning postal service was missing, no goods could be easily ordered or accounted for. Any corporate relation and agreements between cities were highly difficult, so that there could not have been any institutionalised production for exchange.

To Oertel it is equally important to warn against swift comparisons in the form of the organisation of work. Terms like 'large-scale factories' or 'heavy industry' might be tempting indications to assume the same complexity of labour division, technological advances, general organisation and management as in modern times.<sup>233</sup> Oertel noted correctly that since the modern factory is in its social placement different from the ancient

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<sup>230</sup> Oertel (1925) p. 523.

<sup>231</sup> Oertel (1925) p. 523 Cf., Zimmern (1915) p. 352 f.

<sup>232</sup> Cf. Ziebarth (1929).

'manufactories', the controversy is therefore 'not only a debate about words'.<sup>234</sup> Like Weber previously, Oertel emphasised that despite an existing division of labour and specialised crafts that must have increased efficiency, machinery and technical progress were missing, and therefore the area of production was rather static and underdeveloped. 'Therefore, organisation and production methods essentially remained craft-based. Technology remained static not dynamic, production was not yet mechanised.'<sup>235</sup> Therefore, the difference between workshops and factories is considerable. Oertel sees the larger workshops as being only occasionally factories, in terms of the numbers of workers. Regarding their technological structure, however, they were based on handicrafts and manual labour. Most importantly, regarding the possibility of capitalism during the classical period, Oertel clearly denies that workshops are the result of a capitalist mode of production.<sup>236</sup> To Oertel, Demosthenes' often mentioned 'sword factory', lacks the characteristics of a capitalist factory. Not at least because of the relationship between capital owner (the workshop owner) and his 30 odd workmen, who were purchased as deposits.<sup>237</sup> Further, Oertel maintained that 'the capital owner dominates and not the capital - the personal and not the material aspects are essential in the relationship between owner and slave. The industrial slaves belong to the house, where they are also catered for - a parallel to the servant's room appears. Therefore, the "*Großbetrieb*" is not an organic whole, but is based on an accumulation of crafts.'<sup>238</sup>

Oertel concluded that the difference between small and large workshops is merely quantitative and not qualitative.<sup>239</sup> The larger workshops might produce a higher output, but do not show any progression in the build up of '*Großindustrie*' in relation to '*Kleinindustrie*'.<sup>240</sup> Large workshops therefore do not benefit the process of production and cannot gain any dominant role in the economy. Oertel argues, almost alongside Bücher's position, by concluding that 'capital has not commenced its creative role; it is only through its predominance that a natural economy can emerge.'<sup>241</sup>

<sup>233</sup> Oertel (1925) p. 526.

<sup>234</sup> Oertel (1925) p. 526.

<sup>235</sup> See Kaerst (1917). That indeed the processes of production employed mostly manufactured work (work with the hand) is explicit on the many frescoes and pictures on the ceramics. For a very interesting study of the forms and tools of craftsmanship see Grassl (1990).

<sup>236</sup> See Oertel (1925) p. 125 n103 Cf. Busolt (1920) p. 191 n3.

<sup>237</sup> Oertel (1925) p. 126 n107.

<sup>238</sup> Oertel (1925) p. 128.

<sup>239</sup> He still uses the words '*Groß- und Kleinbetriebe*', which are more appropriate for modern manufacturing.

<sup>240</sup> Oertel (1925) p. 529.

<sup>241</sup> Oertel (1925) p. 529. n111.

Oertel's analysis of the historical sources and discussion of Hellas during the classical period appears carried out with care and depth. A so-called 'primitivist' might perhaps label some of the terminology used by Oertel, such as 'factory plant' ('*Großbetrieb*') and 'large-scale industry' ('*Großindustrie*'), as misjudged. However, Oertel deserves support and acknowledgement in his efforts to highlight the versatile but non-capitalistic character of the Hellenic economy. For the classical period, Oertel mentions three factors which 'got in the way' of a possible capitalist mode of production. First, uncertainty, secondly, the differences in the acquisition and form of capital and thirdly, the peculiarities of slave labour.<sup>242</sup>

Although one could imagine that the defenders of the view of the existence of ancient capitalism in Hellas, such as Meyer, Beloch and Gummerus, would have criticised Oertel's criteria for defining the economy of the classical period, it is however not difficult to speculate what kind of arguments these authors could have raised against Oertel. Three arguments can be constructed that are fairly obvious. Firstly, we could argue that the development of modern capitalism was accompanied by even more political unrest and devastating warfare than ever present throughout antiquity. Secondly, resulting from political uncertainty, the money economy was not only underdeveloped and frequently thrown back into barter in ancient times, but also in modern history. Regarding Oertel's claim that no serious banking and giro exchange took place, we could also assert that during the early stages of capitalism, problems of acquisition of money capital and raw-material was extremely difficult. Finally, even if Bücher was correct in claiming that slave labour in the form of slave armies are exaggerations of the extent of slavery, and that Weber's is correct in pointing out that slaves belonged and lived under the roof of the household or estate owner and were part of a social structure, still, this is not eradicating the possibility of the existence of capitalism in antiquity. The development of capitalism has shown in more than one case, that capitalists looked after their workers, or created a kind of company town environment. That the modern worker was free to leave does not seem to lead to a strong factor for the development of capitalism but could, on the other hand, make slave labour less effective, mainly because of a permanent duty by the owner to look after them.

If not capitalist, what was the nature of the 'economy of classical Greece'? For Oertel it is difficult to come to a definite conclusion, because of the amount of contrary

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<sup>242</sup> Oertel (1925) p. 529.

historical sources and the different developments within different cities. It seems to be certain that Oertel had strong doubt about Pöhlmann's analogies between leaseholder, co-operations and industrial trusts.<sup>243</sup> In respect of the debate between Bücher and Meyer, Oertel perhaps held some kind of 'middle position' regarding classical Greece, which had previously been suggested about Weber's interpretation. Oertel states that 'I can save myself to address the question whether the just characterised economy was, in Bücher's terms, more national or city based, because we cannot expect a positive furtherance by it. Since the structure was monetary, not barter, but also not loan orientated, in the Hildebrandian sense, it should be clear without a doubt, that it had a strong exchange orientated character.'<sup>244</sup> That this strong exchange orientated weft was still not enough to provide the stable conditions of a capitalist economy has been made clear above.

Remarkable in Oertel's analysis is certainly careful and knowledgeable dealing with the historical material, which should be noted positively in mind when analysing his elucidation of the 'social question' in antiquity, especially with regard to the discussion about the possibility of socialism and capitalism in antiquity. We hear that 'so far, I have concentrated on the Athenian circumstances of the 5<sup>th</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> century, since they form the precondition for the socialist ideas of antiquity, which developed during that time'.<sup>245</sup> In opposition to Bücher, Oertel maintained that the 'economic climax of the ancient economy and therewith ancient capitalism was reached during the Hellenic period i.e. during the flourishing period of the Roman empire of the second half of the 2<sup>nd</sup> century BC until the end of the 2<sup>nd</sup> century AD.'<sup>246</sup> Oertel further argued that the relatively long peaceful period after the 2<sup>nd</sup> Peleponesian War created a very new political, social and also 'economic atmosphere'. As in Meyer, Beloch and Pöhlmann, Oertel refers to technological advances, which brought about better and safer means of transport. The building of roads, for example, allowed an improvement in communication, new coastal cities emerged and the flow of trade advanced. Businessmen created a kind of exchequer to exchange not only goods, but mainly information and deals. A coastal guard secured the transport of those goods etc. 'The accumulation of capital took place to an unprecedented extent.'<sup>247</sup> 'A kind of giro exchange occurred..., the pay and banking system took modern shape,...even if

<sup>243</sup> Oertel (1925) p. 531.

<sup>244</sup> Oertel (1925) p. 537. Cf also Riezler (1907) p. 98.

<sup>245</sup> Oertel (1925) p. 537.

<sup>246</sup> Bücher argued that the archaic period of Athens expressed the highest development in terms of wealth, but did not claim that such a period could be regarded as socialism. Oertel's statement appears in this respect rather as conjectural. Oertel (1925) p. 537.

<sup>247</sup> Oertel (1925) p. 538.

initially the bank monopoly hindered the money exchange still, those manacles were removed during Roman times.’<sup>248</sup> Oertel’s enthusiasm for the ‘economic boom’ in antiquity on a capitalist basis seems to have no limits. We hear of the development of ‘industrial centres in great style’, ‘a real aspiration towards acquiring an export territory played an important role in the large-scale politics’, ‘Egyptian papyrus flooded the ancient world’ as a mass-product. ‘In short, everywhere enjoyed an economic boom!’<sup>249</sup>

For some reason, Oertel discusses the textual evidence in far less detail than in his previous chapter on the non-capitalist periods. ‘U[rich] Wilcken in his paper *Alexander der Große und die Hellenische Wirtschaft*’ calls this period quite rightly mercantilist...We can observe a progress during the blooming Hellenic-Roman period, a progress in the dimensions of capitalism, in the dimensions of exports, the international commodity exchange and the plants.’<sup>250</sup> Of course, we should not overlook Oertel’s efforts to separate ancient from modern capitalism. However, this difference is for him mainly a question of scope or quantity. Surely, the political environment and the degree of rationalisation as well as technological progress are qualitatively different i.e. more underdeveloped, but it seems that Oertel is no longer sensitive towards a distinct terminology. This methodological slip as well as the lack of consideration of almost any arguments by Edgar Salin or Karl Bücher triggers him to formulate the ‘labourer question’ (*Arbeiterfrage*) even more strongly than Pöhlmann did.

Oertel returns to his analysis of the circumstances of 5<sup>th</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> century Athens. ‘That free labour existed in general can be said without a shadow of doubt. It belongs to the achievements of the positive theory to have destroyed the erring belief that craftsmanship was mainly slave work.’<sup>251</sup> Free labour existed, but according to Aristarchus and other sources, it is something unethical and involuntary. ‘Nonetheless, in our days the desire to engage in wage labour with wages of a private businessman is not very great either...But because of the fact that inside a society there are less pleasurable tasks, it becomes the core of the modern social problem’.<sup>252</sup> However, whilst modern society does not provide a solution to this problem yet, for Oertel, antiquity found a solution in slavery. Enslavement was not only a material condition in order to secure a successful harvest, but also a step towards preventing continuous aggression by enslaving the enemy. The

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<sup>248</sup> Oertel (1925) pp. 538-539.

<sup>249</sup> Oertel (1925) p. 539.

<sup>250</sup> Oertel (1925) p. 441.

<sup>251</sup> Oertel (1925) p. 542 n194.

<sup>252</sup> Oertel (1925) p. 543.

proportion of slave labour was calculated by Oertel to be 50 % of the population towards the end of the 5<sup>th</sup> century.

Similarly to Weber, Oertel blamed the increasing use of slave labour, which apparently crowded-out the self-employed craftsmen, as a key factor for the development of a social question or crisis. The social effects forced the native population to work side by side with the slaves. Living conditions worsened and the native population were forced into dependent services or even faced unemployment unless there was some kind of public investment (e.g. temple building). 'Unemployment was further increased by the laziness, which originated in the disregard for labour activities that were usually carried out by slaves, and on the other hand, by the state socialist payment system.'<sup>253</sup> The state of the economy in archaic and classical Greece constituted the basis for a working-class question, which developed a kind of 'consumer proletariat'.

For Rome, Oertel assumes the same process occurred after the Punic wars. This was the process by which 'on Greco-Roman soil it came to the pauperisation of the masses, only the causes and the shading are different from the modern age.'<sup>254</sup> Even if Oertel defended Pöhlmann's main observation in this respect, he made a considerable effort to modify the former's results concerning the different character of the archaic and Hellenic periods. Oertel acknowledges the importance and achievements of the Athenian political constitution, which geared collective effort and private enterprise towards a public good. However, Oertel does not carry out a detailed analysis.

Despite his efforts to avoid following Pöhlmann's extreme position by presenting 'a slightly different' interpretation, Oertel does not discuss the 'negativists' assertions in detail. Instead, in the fourth and final part of his supplement, the reader learns about the existence of ancient socialism, which Oertel, to his credit, tries to distinguish from modern socialism. Ancient and modern socialism are distinct from one another in terms of the altered premises about the nature of the economy and the proletariat. Pöhlmann highlighted the claim that it is not possible to describe a system as socialist by only considering the state of ownership in a society. However, besides noting the different idealistic and political circumstances that gave different city states a different shade of socialism, Oertel fails to discuss the question of whether the term socialism can be applied at all adequately to certain periods in antiquity. If we simply make the question of ownership the criterion of the nature of society, then we have no reason to believe that

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<sup>253</sup> Oertel (1925) p. 548 n223.

<sup>254</sup> Oertel (1925) p. 549.

there was ancient socialism or capitalism. Oertel has obviously ignored the fact that property relations are set in a certain historical framework. State socialism is not necessarily the kind of moral economy which Aristotle demanded in *Nicomachean Ethics* or in the *Politics*.<sup>255</sup> Nevertheless, Oertel also pointed out correctly that the 'collective-economical' basis stands in a relationship to the 'capitalist mode of production'.<sup>256</sup> This mode of production has certain essential characteristics such as factories and monotonous labour, with a strict separation of capital and labour and a 'subjection' of labour under capital. However, all these careful definitions seem to be applicable only to certain periods of antiquity. Further we hear of 'mass-individualism', a tendency towards subjectivism in the spiritual life, which Oertel claimed to be the period of the ancient enlightenment. Undoubtedly, Oertel rejected Pöhlmann's generalisation, which overlooked the complexity of the ancient social development on purpose. Finally, we are also informed about ancient communism with the example of the Cynics.<sup>257</sup> Oertel's idea of socialism in antiquity is characterised in the tendency towards sharing the means of production, and is therefore not a definition of genuine common ownership of the means of production. Oertel seemed to have reduced the social question to a political question. This indicates that he saw himself more in the tradition of the historicist than on Lamprecht's side of social and cultural history.<sup>258</sup>

To summarise Oertel's stance: At the beginning of his discussion of Pöhlmann's '*Soziale Frage*' discourse he advocated caution and aimed to avoid oversimplifying generalisations. He noted too, that the debate between Bücher and Meyer, Beloch and Pöhlmann is not only one of words, but of a fundamental character. At the end of his enquiry it is difficult not to have the impression that Oertel only elaborates and clarifies what has been previously said by Pöhlmann, and partly by Meyer. In terms of the arguments raised by Bücher, Oertel seems to agree that at least for the classical period the Hellenic economy was not national and capitalist. Although, in general his supplement is valuable for its bibliographical detail and discusses a large amount of literature in the field of the history of the historiography of the ancient economy, his work remains oblivious of the methodological questions that made the positions between Bücher and Meyer incommensurable with regard to the methodology that both employed. Despite Oertel's best intentions, he reduces the problems surrounding the Controversy to be merely a

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<sup>255</sup> See Wilamowitz (1893) vol II and generally Meikle (1995b) ch. 5.6.

<sup>256</sup> Oertel (1925) p. 549.

<sup>257</sup> Oertel (1925) p. 550 n228.

quantitative matter. He seemed to have failed to acknowledge that a debate about words can also be a debate about concept formation. In Oertel's paper 'Class Struggle and Socialism in Ancient Greece' he expressed even more explicitly an application of modern concepts into the ancient past simply by stating that modern socialism/capitalism is entirely similar to ancient social forms.

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<sup>258</sup> See Christ (1981) and Stahlmann in Flashar (1995) p. 517, also Oertel himself (1925) p. 38 f.

### iii. Johannes Hasebroek - 'Ancient and Modern Imperialism'

The relationship between the present and the past represented in analogies was also of importance in Johannes Hasebroek's considerations about the nature of the ancient economy. According to the modern interpretation of the Bücher-Meyer Controversy, it was Johannes Hasebroek who separated the debatees into 'primitivists' and 'modernists'.<sup>259</sup> However, nowhere in Hasebroek's works does he actually make this distinction by using such terminology.<sup>260</sup> Hasebroek's own contribution to the controversy is often underestimated and although his name appears in many modern contemporary works, only a few serious attempts have been made to discuss his academic achievements and stance. Erich Pack, in his essay 'Johannes Hasebroek and the beginnings of ancient history in Cologne' gives the only detailed overview of his works and achievements.<sup>261</sup> It is still the most useful and complex discussion in the history of historiography of Hasebroek's works.

1995 would have been Johannes Hasebroek's 100<sup>th</sup> birthday. Sadly, apart from a small column in the *Neue Züricher Zeitung* this anniversary was hardly noticed amongst ancient historians. His premature death, poverty of means and long illness prevented him from producing voluminous amounts of literature in ancient history, for which some of his colleagues are known for. However, regardless of his short scholarly career, it is nevertheless surprising that his work is so little recognised, even today; with the exception of Moses I. Finley of course.<sup>262</sup>

Regardless of the fact that Hasebroek has not reached the fame of Theodor Mommsen or Eduard Meyer in ancient history, he was one of the most original and influential scholars of his discipline during the 1920s. His early works and lectures indicated that he already had a strong interest in economic and political matters of antiquity.<sup>263</sup> His lectures 'The Ancient Polis, State and Political Theory of the Greeks', 'Alexander the Great', 'History of the Roman Private Law' and 'The History of the

<sup>259</sup> Humphreys (1978) p. 139.

<sup>260</sup> Someone, who draws straight analogies between ancient and modern events, is not necessarily a modernist. Nor is someone who believes in the primitive character of the ancient economy necessarily a primitivist. Such generalisations tempt all to quickly to assign other attributes found in modernism and anti-modernism (for and against modernity).

<sup>261</sup> There is so far only one more detailed study on Hasebroek, which was carried out by Pack (1987). Other articles mentioning Hasebroek include Berve (1959) and Brake (1937). However, the main inspiration for this chapter is taken from Pack (1987).

<sup>262</sup> See especially Finley (1965) p. 1 ff. 'Hasebroek's receives the merit for re-establishing economic life within the cadre of the *polis*.' Finley refers here also to Will's acknowledgement of this fact.

<sup>263</sup> Pack (1987) p. 11 ff.

Decline of the Ancient World', indicate that Hasebroek had a wide range of interests in what one would today call the social and economic history of the ancient world.

The works of Eduard Meyer, who during the first quarter of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, was one of the leading German ancient historians of international standing, clearly dominated the discipline of ancient history and became text book literature during Hasebroek's years of study at Heidelberg. Despite the later apparent disagreement between Meyer and the younger Hasebroek about the character of the early Greek economy, Hasebroek rated Meyer very highly as an influential historian and was influenced by his way of characterising the ancient economy.<sup>264</sup> Apart from Meyer we should also mention Ulrich Wilcken's influence, who proposed Hasebroek for the post of academic assistant in papyrology at Heidelberg. Hasebroek's article about the Greek banking system of 1920 was still very much in line with the Beloch-Meyer position of the modern character of the ancient economy Greek.<sup>265</sup>

The publication of his papers 'Modes of Operation of Greek Trade' (1923) and 'The Imperialistic Idea in Antiquity' (1926) indicated a change in his stance towards Bücher. Both works also formed the basis of his two major works in ancient 'economic' history; *State and Trade in Ancient Greece* (1927) and *Greek Economic and Social History until the Persian Age* (1931). Both books stand out not only in terms of the detailed discussion of sources, but also in terms of their intellectual depth and effort to grasp the important aspects of the pre-Hellenic *polis*. In referring to Walter Otto's *Kulturgeschichte des Altertums* (1925), Hasebroek asserted that 'today there is a reaction against the familiar idealisation of antiquity, and the theory that it reached an advanced stage of economic development has found support.'<sup>266</sup> And further, 'on the whole it is coming to be recognised that the extreme modernising attitude, hitherto prevalent, can no longer be maintained. The household-economy theory of Rodbertus and Bücher was exaggerated, but there is no longer any reason to doubt that Bücher was right in repudiating the conventional view, or that the economic conditions of the 5<sup>th</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> century were relatively primitive. The old views of ancient industrialism have been largely modified and in particular the fantastic picture of an industrialised Greek state is steadily beginning

<sup>264</sup> In this context we should refer to Pack's claim (1987) p. 9 n15, that it is not clear whether Hasebroek and Meyer had any kind of contact about the issue involving the controversy. It is unfortunate that Hasebroek wished to have his academic correspondence destroyed after his death.

<sup>265</sup> See Hasebroek (1920) p113 f. Here Meyer receives explicit praise for having highlighted the point that 5<sup>th</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> century Hellas stood pretty much under the influence of developed money economy'. On the other hand Rodbertus and Bücher are criticised for their schematic description of the ancient economy as limiting the scope of the use of money.

to fade.’<sup>267</sup> Whilst in the ancient Mediterranean sea trade a money owner was solely a landlord, who mostly laid out capital for the merchant i.e. the ship owner without participating in the actual business in any kind of form. In the medieval *commenda*, the *stans* is for the most part an experienced elderly professional trader, who continues to shape and influence the business. Although there are examples of priests who lent money, they were not actively involved in the business activities.<sup>268</sup>

Hasebroek, in his article on the ‘Imperialistic Idea in Antiquity’ of 1926 draws a very sharp distinction between ancient and modern forms of imperialism. He states that ‘What connects all lawful communities and societies is the high ideal of the people’s family and the people’s solidarity.’<sup>269</sup> The *pax christiana* was created in order to protect that spirit of the community. It was not until modern times that nationalism became a dynamic force in the construction of independent states which promoted the special interest of churches. ‘Antiquity probably came into the consciousness of the cultural solidarity of the peoples. First of a pan-Hellenic, then - the concept of the *oikomene* - spanning over the whole of humanity, but never of a political solidarity.’<sup>270</sup> ‘Plato and Aristotle never talk about foreign politics’, Hasebroek asserts. This rather traditional stance of relying on written documents rather than on archaeological findings was continued after Rostovtzeff in the methods of Polanyi and Finley. Both argued, similarly to Hasebroek 70 years earlier, that ‘the will to live of the ancient states found its support by the ethical commitment of its citizens and the constitution of the *polis*, but not by the desire for power over other states.’<sup>271</sup> That is to say, that according to Hasebroek, the ancient aggressive policies towards neighbouring *polis* was mainly driven by the ideal to achieve superior autonomy amongst these city states. The driving forces in the wars and disputes over sea rule and rule over territory was not about export markets, but about pride and autonomy. Hasebroek maintains, that ‘only at a much higher human stage of development do we see wars fought in the name of trade politics.’<sup>272</sup> ‘Corinth was not a commercial city with a merchant fleet, nor was the commercial spirit penetrating its public life, and it was never

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<sup>266</sup> Hasebroek (1933) p. v

<sup>267</sup> Hasebroek (1933) p. v-vi In this context, Oertel, Weber, Bolkenstein and Francotte appear as examples for such a modified view. However, it is debatable in the context of the previous discussions whether their views are simply modifications of the modern view. At least in the case of Weber, we can see a unique position not just middle or modified view.

<sup>268</sup> See Hasebroek (1966).

<sup>269</sup> Hasebroek (1926) p. 1.

<sup>270</sup> Hasebroek (1926) p. 2.

<sup>271</sup> Hasebroek (1926) p. 5

<sup>272</sup> Hasebroek (1926) p. 9.

the centre of an export bound industry.<sup>273</sup> Antiquity, Hasebroek concludes, is based on 'a state of fighting' for the sake of salvaging ones' pride.<sup>274</sup>

Although Hasebroek had warned his readers earlier about the exaggerations of the modern character of the ancient economy, he himself did just that for the Hellenic period and Rome. The exact motives as to why Hasebroek turned his back on the event orientated and modernising historiography are not clear from his publications. Unfortunately, his correspondence was destroyed after his death. Pack suggested that Hasebroek's relative reservation against quick analogies between ancient and modern times and events might be due to his liberal upbringing.<sup>275</sup> The liberal and less intense working environment of Zürich in the early 1920s, perhaps provided Hasebroek with a more independent view on modern problems away from the frantically changing political climate in the Weimar Republic.<sup>276</sup> His move to Cologne may have marked the beginning of his scholarship in ancient social and economic history. His first lecture in June 1927 was called 'homo politicus', which used elements of Aristotelian political philosophy in his thought.<sup>277</sup> His two books were preceded by a number of short articles on the peculiar and independent character of the ancient Greek world.

Max Weber's writings clearly influenced Hasebroek's stance, which was more orientated on Bücher than on Meyer and Beloch. The Weber-reception began halfway through the 1920s and evidently influenced Hasebroek's position.<sup>278</sup> Näf emphasised that during the 1930s the anti-modernistic interpretation gained the upper hand. However, this position is difficult to reconcile with his judgement that the anti-modern view of Heichelheim and Hasebroek did not benefit their career.<sup>279</sup> Heichelheim, as a member of a Jewish family, had to resort to emigration. Hasebroek retired from academia 'on health grounds' due to a conspiracy against him in 1937.<sup>280</sup>

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<sup>273</sup> Hasebroek (1926) p. 9.

<sup>274</sup> Hasebroek (1926) p. 10.

<sup>275</sup> Pack notes (1987) p. 11 n55 that all people he was able to ask about Hasebroek judged him as very democratic.

<sup>276</sup> Pack (1987) p. 12

<sup>277</sup> Hasebroek came from a middle class background. His personality and liberal attitude seemed to have influenced his historical writings so to avoid the pompous vocabulary used frequently by the traditionalists Meyer, Pöhlmann and also Droysen. It is therefore no surprise that Hasebroek did not, unlike many of his colleagues, participated in nazi propaganda. Pack pointed out p. 18 that Hasebroek was 'very little a 'political' scholar, who believed like many others to have the opportunity to 'over-winter' the years of Hitler's regime. This was however not granted to him. Hasebroek belonged to the few scholars who supported the Weimar Republic in all its weaknesses and deficiencies.

<sup>278</sup> Cf. Heuss (1965) p. 556 f.

<sup>279</sup> Näf in Flashar (1995) p. 299.

<sup>280</sup> Pack 1987 p. 14.

Hasebroek summarised the difference between the ancient and the modern citizen in the following way: 'the capitalistic feeling of the medieval city is primarily concerned with trade and craftsmanship; the ideal *polis* citizen is farmer and landlord.'<sup>281</sup> Hasebroek argued that the Greek *polis* did not support and promote trade, but at the most rather exploited it fiscally. The Greek *polis* followed rather imperialistic aims and sought to satisfy its citizens with basic needs.

Although Hasebroek's position appeared initially very isolated in ancient history, his two works found a very wide circle of readers as well as reviewers.<sup>282</sup> That the Bücher-Meyer Controversy was of course still part of the wider debate about the usefulness of ancient history and therefore should not be disconnected from general issues of historical methodology, is indicated by Hasebroek himself in a letter to M. I. Rostovtzeff in which he noted that 'I still regret it, that German ancient history does possess not enough interest and therefore not enough knowledge about all these problems. Oertel and me [Hasebroek], we are almost the only ones who deal with economic questions.'<sup>283</sup> Hasebroek did not mention Laum, Salin, Ziebarth, Schwahn and Heichelheim. The reason for this unawareness is not clear. Perhaps Hasebroek regarded those historians still in the tradition of political history as opposed to cultural history *à la* Lamprecht. Indications that this might have been the case are suggested by Pack.

Before Hasebroek was forced into retirement, he worked on a counterpart of his Greek social and economical studies for Roman history, which exists only as an unpublished manuscript.<sup>284</sup> His *Staat und Handel* was positively received in the English speaking world after its translation in 1933.<sup>285</sup> In addition, Eduard Will paid considerable tribute in his well-known *Annales* article of 1957, in which he aimed to summarise the debate about the character of economic life in antiquity.<sup>286</sup> That this article 'summed up the old debate in a most influential way, setting the standards for all future discussions and paying a very honourable tribute to his German predecessor' is however only partly true and more or less an exaggeration of an undoubtedly important piece of historiography. Apart from Will's clear sympathy towards Hasebroek, the English speaking tradition with Polanyi and Finley also show clear signs of Hasebroek's influence. In Germany we might recall the *Christian Meier School* of the 1960s and in Italy of course Mario Mazza, who

<sup>281</sup> See appendix of the *Neue Züricher Zeitung*

<sup>282</sup> See Pack's bibliography (1987).

<sup>283</sup> Pack 1987 p. 8

<sup>284</sup> Unfortunately this work was not available.

<sup>285</sup> See Pack (1987) p. 33

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produced the most comprehensive interpretation of the Bücher-Meyer Controversy to date, including a good discussion on Hasebroek's arguments.

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<sup>286</sup> See Will (1954) pp. 7-22.

*iv. Bernhard Laum and Arthur Rosenberg*<sup>287</sup>

Original contributions towards the subject of ancient economic history, apart from Hasebroek, were relatively rare during the 1920s. As previously emphasised, the traditional conservative attitude against economic history as part of social history remained and was not seriously influenced by the argumentative reinforcement of Wilcken and Oertel. However the political economist, Bernhard Laum, and the historian Arthur Rosenberg, added interesting contributions to the topic which had an impact on ancient political history of the post war period.

Laum's work *Die Sakrale Funktion des Geldes* 'The Sacred Function of Money' focused on the sacred function of money in antiquity. By using Homer's Iliad and the Odyssey, Laum attempted to show that 'the value measurement in cows did not operate for the purpose of exchange, but that it was rather an intra-social value measure.'<sup>288</sup> Laum also believed in theories of economic stages and positioned himself alongside Bücher in the controversy.<sup>289</sup> Laum himself seemed to interpret the Bücher-Meyer Controversy as a debate between the pros and cons of theories of economic stages, which makes his interpretation quite unique.

For Laum the origin of trade is non-economic since public events, such as the cult feasts, offered the best opportunities to have social intercourse and exchange scarce necessary objects.<sup>290</sup> Laum is most criticised for his account of the origin of coinage. Again he emphasises the religious importance of the mint and inquires about how it became a 'world means'. Money is not circulated and kept because of its quality to preserve exchange value, but rather to symbolise belonging to the 'totemistic society'.<sup>291</sup> 'The face of the coin is a holy symbol', which in fact guarantees the ability to purchase. Even if Laum's explanations might sound plausible to someone who emphasises the anti-capitalist character of the ancient economy and its ethical depth, we need to note that Laum's hypothesis of the origin of coinage is a rather arbitrary assumption which was never sufficiently substantiated by sources.

Money is, in accordance to Laum's investigations, a creation of the religious-political order. It is natural that every scientist has the inclination to emphasise newly

<sup>287</sup> See Schachenmayer (1964) p. 135 ff. See also Rosenberg (1921a) and (1921b)

<sup>288</sup> See also Laum (1922) p 427f.

<sup>289</sup> Wittenburg in Flashar (1995) p. 269.

<sup>290</sup> Laum (1924) p. 100.

produced results. 'This happened here too. Such a proceeding is not dangerous, as long as it does not become a dogma.'<sup>292</sup> Laum argues, in the 'universal spirit of Max Weber', against the 'isolated theory', which does not take non-economical elements sufficiently into consideration. The isolated theory or a rather primitive or simple explanation is then to be found amongst the 'modernisers' of the ancient economy and not amongst the 'primitive' interpretations.

Laum tries to escape the schematics of 'primitivismus vs. modernismus' by drawing and emphasising the peculiarities of the Greek history and its social life; he seeks to avoid 'the rather worn rails of a diverse and irreconcilable discussion.'<sup>293</sup> Although the intellectual ties with Weber are clearly visible and Laum mentions Weber's work very frequently, it is questionable whether Laum grasped the complexity of the Controversy adequately. 'In Homeric Greece, the type of the "closed household economy" is almost completely realised'.<sup>294</sup> Wittenberg suggested that Meyer argued the opposite i.e. that trade was the leading factor of the cultural development'.<sup>295</sup> This is correct, but Meyer did not argue that the whole of antiquity was embedded in flourishing trade. As we saw, the Homeric period follows a feudal agrarian type of economic development in antiquity. Against Meyer, Laum points out that the desire to possess commodities of foreign origin was not a desire that dominated the ethos of the ancients entirely. By developing the concept of the '*Schenkende Wirtschaft*' (gift-giving economy), exchange during the Homeric period was a time of giving and taking of gifts.<sup>296</sup> Exchange was limited to kings and dukes, and not so much carried out by the ordinary citizen. Only the aristocracy were able to shift commodities as signs of their power and wealth to their neighbours.

In terms of his historic method, Laum does agree with Meyer in rejecting the comparative method. He points out that 'ethnology is not a historic science.'<sup>297</sup> The primitive cultures are very far apart from us. However it is not clear whether Laum is asserting that the whole of antiquity or at least the Greek history is of a primitive character, whilst ours is of a civilised nature.

Laum, as I mentioned, moved from being an ancient historian to become a political economist, but his works, perhaps due to the dominant position of the modernising

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<sup>291</sup> Laum (1924) p. 140-141.

<sup>292</sup> Wittenberg in Flashar (1995) p. 268.

<sup>293</sup> Wittenberg in Flashar (1995) p. 269.

<sup>294</sup> Wittenberg in Flashar (1995) p. 270.

<sup>295</sup> Laum (1924) p. 90

<sup>296</sup> Laum (1960) p. 139.

<sup>297</sup> Laum (1960) p. 5.

tendencies, found little support among either side of scholarship, as his supporter Wilhelm Gerloff noted in *Die Entstehung des Geldes und die Anfänge des Geldwesens* of 1943.<sup>298</sup> What seems to be unfounded in Humphreys' often mentioned introduction to his *Anthropology and the Greeks*, are the accusations that Laum defended the 'closed economy' of Nazi Germany.<sup>299</sup> Bernard Laum's *Schenkende Wirtschaft* is supporting the negative theory of the liberal Karl Bücher. Soon, however, he was accused of using this concept as a propaganda tool to defend the state economy of the Hitler government.<sup>300</sup>

We argued earlier that the rather traditional view of ancient history based on the Rankean paradigm and influenced by the Prussian School remained dominant throughout the 1920s and 30s. It is therefore not possible or necessary to outline all the historicist contributions towards ancient history which dealt with social issues. We might therefore concentrate rather on an alternative approach and see how the traditionalists i.e. the historicist tradition dealt with it.

Arthur Rosenberg's interpretation of the ancient economy was also, to some degree, politically motivated. Although Rosenberg came from a conservative background, as did most ancient historians in Germany, he gained his reputation as one of the few historians on the political Left. His essay *Demokratie und Klassenkampf im Altertum* was characteristic of his stance.<sup>301</sup> He emphasised 'the view that the essence of all history is to be found in class struggles, and affirms itself completely in the considerations about antiquity.'<sup>302</sup> It was not the use of modern Marxist vocabulary, which we surprisingly also found in Oertel and Pöhlmann, which gave Rosenberg a unique position amongst historians, but rather his effort to challenge the hijacking of antiquity by the conservative nationalistic orientated historians *à la* Beloch and Meyer.

Besides his work as a part-time lecturer at the Friedrich-Willhelm University of Berlin, he educated workers at a local evening college open to the public. Rosenberg did not oppose the use of ancient history to warn about modern trends and developments. Rather, he argued against what he called 'the conservative abuse of ancient history'.<sup>303</sup> By doing so, he tried to deliver an alternative account of classical antiquity '*von unten*' from

<sup>298</sup> See Gerloff (1943).

<sup>299</sup> Humphreys (1977) p. 38.

<sup>300</sup> We could not detect any evidence to support the claim that Laum was a strong Nazi supporter. Being a member of the NSDAP was nothing unusual for an academic scholar during that time and almost unavoidable as well.

<sup>301</sup> Wehler (1982) pp. 19-102.

<sup>302</sup> Wehler (1982) p. 23.

<sup>303</sup> Wehler (1982) p. 23.

the social basis of society. However, this alternative was not a so-called primitive interpretation *a la* Bücher and Rodbertus.

Rosenberg followed his mentor Eduard Meyer, despite having a very different political outlook. Clear parallels to Meyer's attempts to interpret certain periods of antiquity by implying a modern structure of the economy regarding ownership relations and class conflict can be seen in Rosenberg's work.<sup>304</sup> Nevertheless Rosenberg still very much followed the tradition of political history, which placed him much closer to the Prussian School and Meyer than his contemporary Johannes Hasebroek was.<sup>305</sup> Regardless of his political aims, the anachronistic use of terminology and the use of politically motivated analogies put Rosenberg more in line with the historicist tradition, who differed from him mainly in respect of the political aims but not methodologically. Stahlmann states correctly that such an attempt to understand ancient history by employing the traditional method in order to create a new Marxist-materialistic picture of ancient economic life was bound to fail.<sup>306</sup>

The following examples should underline Rosenberg's use of modern concepts and Marxist terminology: 'The older Rome during the 6<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> century was ruled by the Roman aristocracy. During the 4<sup>th</sup> century the aristocratic rule was replaced by the property owning classes as a whole. In the year of 287 BC, the class of the small farmers took over the political power and created the Roman democracy'.<sup>307</sup> 'The rule of the Roman credit institutes was forty years long; it shattered the state completely and threw the subjected country into misery. Only after a bloody civil war were the loyal citizens and farmers under the leadership of Sulla able to break the power of the capitalist party (in year 80)'.<sup>308</sup>

In criticism of efforts to modernise ancient history, Gelzer warned as early as 1920 of 'the modern arrogance, by employing its pre-prepared practical theories, to win power over the past and to master it with its own patterns. There is no better means to block access to the true historical circumstances than this one'.<sup>309</sup>

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<sup>304</sup> Wehler (1982) p. 37 ff.

<sup>305</sup> Stahlmann inferred that Oertel was lacking this interest in Flashar (1995) p. 318. Perhaps he was more interested in economic issues, but he always viewed them as part of the political too.

<sup>306</sup> Stahlmann in Flashar (1995) p. 319.

<sup>307</sup> Wehler (1982) p. 84.

<sup>308</sup> See Rosenberg (1921a).

<sup>309</sup> Gelzer (1920) p. 154.

v. *Michael I. Rostovtzeff - the Decline of the Russian and the Roman Empire*

Hasebroek's aversion to attempts to understand the nature of ancient economic life with modern concepts was not appreciated amongst the so called 'modernisers'. Oertel, who is also regarded as a moderniser reviewed Hasebroek's books, with serious criticism especially regarding Hasebroek's dealing with the historical material. However, Hasebroek's book *Staat und Handel* set out to address a wider audience and to be an introductory book for undergraduate students. Michael I. Rostovtzeff (1870-1952), on the other hand, belongs much more to the tradition of conservative historians of the Rankean kind. His works were therefore much more in line with what was regarded as serious *Altertumswissenschaft*. Rostovtzeff also entertained the modern view of the ancient economy that is, we can draw analogies between events during certain periods of antiquity which possess the same pattern or are of the similar kind as modern problems. Again, we should not understand similarities as sameness. No serious historian in our analysis has claimed that antiquity and modern capitalism are exactly the same. However, in terms of how far such an analogy between modern and ancient times between different periods of history can go, 'no historian, regarding that period [antiquity], has achieved more for the modern view than M. I. Rostovtzeff,...who can only be compared with Theodor Mommsen's achievements.'<sup>310</sup> We shall see on the following pages whether Karl Christ's praise is justified in respect of Rostovtzeff. Certainly, Rostovtzeff one most influential ancient historians during the second quarter of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>311</sup>

Rostovtzeff who was born in Kiev, unifies uniquely the modern European tradition with the values of aristocratic Czaristic Russia. Influenced by the well-known philologist Taddeus Zielinski, Rostovtzeff gained a solid education in the classics at St. Petersburg University. The archaeologist Kondakov was also enormous influence on Rostovtzeff.

The influential works of Mommsen and Weber began his interest in Roman political and economic history. The leading position of the German scholarship in ancient legal and political history as well as his first major publication, his doctoral thesis, brought

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<sup>310</sup> Christ (1972) p. 334.

<sup>311</sup> Since there is still no monograph available on Rostovtzeff we will concentrate on Christ (1972), the bibliographical detail has been obtained largely from Mansi (1998), and the following literature. Beyer (1994), D'Arms (1977) and Momigliano (1954). On the political views of Rostovtzeff see also Wes (1990).

him closer to the German classical and historical scholarship.<sup>312</sup> Meyer and Wilamowitz already viewed Rostovtzeff's early work positively after an important turn towards ancient painting and archaeology as well as the interpretation of ornaments of southern Russian and early Iran-Greek tribes.<sup>313</sup> Due to the October Revolution, Rostovtzeff fled into exile in England where he wrote polemic articles against the new political system. In 1910, under the influence of Ulrich Wilcken and his work on the social and administrative history of the Roman Empire, Rostovtzeff published his *Studies of the Roman Colonate*, 'a major contribution which made his reputation.'<sup>314</sup>

Rostovtzeff failed to receive a permanent position at Oxford in part because of his heavy Russian accent. Hugh Last, who would later become Camden Professor of Ancient History at Oxford and who did not much care for Rostovtzeff personally, wrote, 'in those days his pronunciation of English was, at least in the lecture-room, extremely difficult to understand; and it must be added that, like other unfortunates in exile, remembering that his knowledge was his main claim to consideration, he was apt to force it on his listeners in conversation with a vigour, which was sometimes thought excessive as was the tone he adopted in some of his reviews of the works of even quite junior scholars.'<sup>315</sup> Although Last did not appreciate Rostovtzeff's strong personality, it seems that he appreciated nevertheless the scope of his work up to the time of his appointment at Oxford, an appreciation which evolved into a deep respect for the Russian's later work.<sup>316</sup> It was at this time that Rostovtzeff became most active in voicing his anti-Communist position. He wrote a number of articles in *Struggling Russia*, *The New Russia* and other periodicals concerning the fate of Russian education under the Communist Party.<sup>317</sup> Rostovtzeff was always a nationalistic orientated Russian patriot and welcomed as a liberal the early stages of the revolution by openly supporting the provisional Kerenski government, which he perceived as being capable of preserving cultural and certain political institutions.<sup>318</sup> To this purpose he wrote a small volume entitled *The Birth of the Roman Empire*. As one of the initial founders of the *Constitutional Democratic Party*, Rostovtzeff detested the ideology

<sup>312</sup> His thesis was called *Römische Bleitesserae, Ein Beitrag zur Sozial- und Wirtschaftsgeschichte der Römischen Kaiserzeit* (1905).

<sup>313</sup> The whole scope of Rostovtzeff's importance and achievements in that area of ancient history cannot be sufficiently considered. For a bibliography see Wes (1990) and more briefly Christ (1972) p. 342 n181

<sup>314</sup> See Momigliano (1954) p. 335.

<sup>315</sup> Last (1953) p. 133 cited in Christ (1972) p. 344.

<sup>316</sup> Last explains that it was probably better that Rostovtzeff did not receive the Camden Chair at Oxford because in England at the time he would have found it very difficult to obtain financial assistance for his great campaign of excavation at Dura Europos (1928-1938).

<sup>317</sup> See the Selected bibliography for a list of seven political papers..

<sup>318</sup> Rostovtzeff (1920d) p. 459.

of the Bolshevik government of Lenin as 'a regime of violence, bloodshed, dictatorship, slavery and enmity towards true culture.'<sup>319</sup> For Rostovtzeff the intelligentsia in Russia had always represented democracy and freedom.<sup>320</sup> 'The Bolshevik seizure', Rostovtzeff wrote, 'meant the complete enslavement of Russian citizens, the death of liberty and morality as well as religion and the complete destruction of culture.'<sup>321</sup> In his essays and articles Rostovtzeff illustrated the total devastation of the Russian educational system at the hands of the Bolsheviks. This of course was not the only element of the new ideology in Russia, which personally affected the intelligentsia immediately following the revolution. A number of Rostovtzeff's colleagues in the Russian Academy of Sciences died in 1918 due to their support of the Russian bourgeoisie and intelligentsia.<sup>322</sup> His bitterness and fury was obviously manifold. Whether it was the loss of his supreme academic status, his home or family, such drastic political changes could not leave him unaffected.

After overcoming the difficulties of leaving his home country, he published the work which earned him lasting credibility as an ancient historian. *The Social and Economic History of the Roman Empire* of 1926 marked a very important career step for him, which he continued at Yale university. His work became a success and was published in a German edition in 1929, in Italian in 1933 and in Spanish in 1937.<sup>323</sup> Of equal success was his *Social and Economic History of the Hellenic World*, which was published in 1941.<sup>324</sup> This encyclopaedic work stood out because of its systematic brilliance which showed clearly that Rostovtzeff drew many results from his own long research rather than drawing on material from second hand sources.

Characteristic of him was, however, a complex but modern interpretation of parts of ancient social history, which in scope and detail were not challenged by any scholar of the non-modern interpretation, such as Salin or Hasebroek. 'Rostovtzeff always emphasised the aristocratic character and urban legation of the ancient culture. His social background, his personal experience and the dangers of his own class conditioned a certain one-sidedness of his social views and judgements.'<sup>325</sup> It is therefore not really surprising that in his analysis of the class structure in antiquity the 'ancient bourgeoisie' formed the most dynamic social group in the social and economic development. This is expressed in

<sup>319</sup> 'Why the Russian Intelligentsia is opposed to the Bolshevik Regime.' in (1920e) p. 793.

<sup>320</sup> Rostovtzeff (1920e) p. 793.

<sup>321</sup> Rostovtzeff 'Should Scientists Return to Russia.' (1920c) p. 370.

<sup>322</sup> Rostovtzeff (1920d) p. 486. Rostovtzeff himself counts seventeen of his colleagues who died at the hands of the communists in that year alone.

<sup>323</sup> For the widely recognition of Rostovtzeff's work see Kahrstedt (1930).

<sup>324</sup> A German edition was published in three volumes in 1955/56.

his argument that the flourishing times of the Hellenic period and the Roman Empire were mainly an achievement of industrious traders, specialists and merchants. Without them, argued Rostovtzeff, the Hellenic world would have never achieved its high standard of development. Momigliano pointed out that, despite all his substantial field work, a realistic interpretation of the social history of the Hellenic world could not be achieved, since Rostovtzeff underestimated, 'typically of an aristocrat', the role of the farmers and craftsmen. The failure to resolve social problems led eventually to the collapse of the Roman Empire. Antiquity receded into 'primitive' state of the household based economy, which Meyer and Weber described as '*Naturalwirtschaft*'.<sup>326</sup> Rostovtzeff linked this downfall to the increasing barbarism originating from inside the new Soviet government.<sup>327</sup> The increasing impoverishment of the cities led to a fallback from the flourishing city economies back into the barter economy. Consequently the class structure experienced a decline in the intellectual spirit by the invasion of the land into the cities, which led to a regressive decline.<sup>328</sup> The sudden collapse of Russia and its fall into barbarism, as Rostovtzeff understood it, and the decline of the Roman empire taught Rostovtzeff an important lesson: no culture or civilisation should rely on the leading qualities of one superior class. Rather all classes had to engage into conscious political action. It is not quite clear though, what kind of democracy or mass participation Rostovtzeff envisaged.<sup>329</sup>

Rostovtzeff was one of the first ancient historians who argued strongly in favour of the use of archaeological findings to be used in conjunction with the analysis of historical documents. Such archaeological findings not only supported and complemented his two greatest works which emerged between 1926 and 1941, but also earned him a reputation close to the standing of Mommsen, Meyer, Grote and Gibbon. The *Social and Economic History of the Roman Empire* (1926) and the *Social and Economic History of the Hellenistic World* (1941) were quickly recognised as outstanding contributions of historical writing. Tarn referred to the *SEHWW* as 'a very great book alike in terms of its vast learning, the ease with which the author handles his huge and complex mass of often-refractory material, in the closeness of its reasoning, and in the sanity of its judgements.'<sup>330</sup> These 'sane judgements' would eventually come under severe criticism by later historians

<sup>325</sup> Christ (1972) p. 344.

<sup>326</sup> *Gründe* p. 294.

<sup>327</sup> Rostovtzeff (1949) vol 2 p. 238.

<sup>328</sup> Rostovtzeff (1949) vol 2 p. 240.

<sup>329</sup> Rostovtzeff (1949) vol 2 p. 247. See also Rostovtzeff's essay 'The decay of the ancient world and its economic explanations' in Rostovtzeff (1930).

<sup>330</sup> See Tarn (1941) p 165 cited in Christ (1972) p.246.

of the Roman and Hellenistic worlds. Bowersock maintained in his 1975 review of the *SEHRE* that few contemporary historians would accept the basic thesis offered by Rostovtzeff but no historian could reject the greatness of the work itself. For the time being, however, Rostovtzeff, due to his sober and enlightened use of materials, which up to that time had not really been utilised as materials for a general history of the ancient world, was seen as a new force in the study of history. The newly developing field of social and economic history were, according to Rostovtzeff, especially neglected by ancient and contemporary scholars.

For a long time, history was mainly political history. Although this includes the historical narrative of an account of the most important crises in political life, or an account of wars and 'great men', Tucidides has already recognised that the incidents of man's history in politics and war were important. It is nevertheless significant to ascertain the causes of these incidents and their connection with one another and with the other phenomena of the life of communities. It was clear to Rostovtzeff that the origin and course of wars were closely connected with the development of economic, social, and religious life and civilisations.<sup>331</sup> The Rankean tradition of historiography did not ignore the importance of social and economic issues, but like Rostovtzeff, regarded cultural and social factors only as part of the political make up of a state. These factors therefore have no independent existence from the history of predominant political ideas.

Certainly unique in Rostovtzeff's view was the use of detailed archaeological findings combined with the study of classical texts. Even today, with the current level of knowledge of archaeology, historians still neglect its importance to the study of history. That is of course not due to its uninteresting character, but perhaps due to its unresolved methodological problems. Rostovtzeff felt strongly that the business of the historian is to collect the factual evidence of man's life, not only from the written records but also from the material evidence left behind. This material evidence shows clearly man's development at different periods of time. According to Rostovtzeff, archaeology must then be completely known by the historian, because much of human existence has not been recorded in a written form. Rostovtzeff was also interested in philological and palaeographical sources, since he thought that the historian must know the languages in which historical documents are written. This is a precondition in order to acknowledge the historic changes those languages went through. Also the historian must be knowledgeable

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<sup>331</sup> Rostovtzeff (1941) p. 7.

with respect to the various systems of language with their cultural peculiarities. Historical geography, which is the science of our relationship with the earth we inhabit, and the distribution of mankind on earth are valuable supportive evidence for the historian who must know the conditions of man's life in different places and at different times of human existence. However, such demands on the systematic and encyclopaedic abilities of the historian were not unique to Rostovtzeff alone, but exemplify once more his attempt to combine the strong tradition of Western, mainly German, philology and Russian archaeology with Beloch's demographic method. 'He [the historian] must know, too, the changes that have taken place in the distribution of mankind upon the globe, the location of this or that people, and the main centres of life of separate nations and of the different kingdoms and empires.'<sup>332</sup> Also the art and the monuments which man has created provided Rostovtzeff with valuable tools in his approach to the study of the ancient world, and the illustrations he offers in his greatest works are treated with great detail. For Rostovtzeff, the art and monuments of the ancient world 'not only throw light upon various aspects of the ancient mind, but bring before the eyes either the great characters of the age in portraits which are often remarkable, or separate scenes from life, as they were represented in the fancy of the ancient sculptors and painters.'<sup>333</sup>

As to Rostovtzeff's theories, it is clear that the experience of his exile loomed large in the formation of his historical work and he was constantly criticised because of it. Like the historicist historiography, the scholars of the post World War I generation concentrated disproportionately on certain events, under the impact of this devastating event, which because of this, gained a new significance. Rostovtzeff was not immune to the tendency of 'using' ancient history for what he was hoping to find as causes in present phenomena.

Gibbon's thesis of the decline and fall of the Roman Empire was a prevailing theme in ancient history right through the centuries. In describing the fall of the Roman Empire, Rostovtzeff found what he wanted to find. The Emperors from Augustus to Marcus Aurelius, through a policy of urbanisation built up an empire based on the success of the urban aristocracy and the city, which fostered inevitably a conflict between the 'bourgeoisie and the peasantry'.<sup>334</sup> After the failure of the Severi to resolve the conflicts between the classes, the power struggle degenerated into civil war, which found its ultimate expression in the crisis of the third century and the eventual collapse of the

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<sup>332</sup> Rostovtzeff (1941) p. 1.

<sup>333</sup> Rostovtzeff (1941) p. 9.

<sup>334</sup> Rostovtzeff (1920d) p. 460.

Roman Empire. An alliance between the 'Italian bourgeoisie' and the 'Italian proletariat', headed by ambitious politicians and military leaders, resulted in the collapse of a possible collaboration of the two privileged orders of Rome. The senatorial and the equestrian, which had formed a class of large 'half-feudal land owners' and 'businessmen', earned their material prosperity from the exploitation of state resources and from their political privileges. Rostovtzeff pointed out that 'the activity of Augustus benefited the victory of the middle and lower classes of Roman citizens, and forced the state to compromise. The middle class in all the cities of the Empire...formed the backbone of the state, and it was consciously developed by the Emperors. The constitutional monarchy of the Antonines...rested on the urban middle class throughout the Empire and on the self government of the cities.'<sup>335</sup>

Rostovtzeff recognised that the civilisation of the Roman Empire was essentially urban. In this environment lay the foundation of the empire, the 'Roman bourgeoisie'. Civilised life was peculiar to the cities of Italy and the important provinces of the empire. The rural communities, in contrast, lived by the most primitive means. The entire 'cultural' and intellectual life took place in the cities and not in rural provinces. Their language, although occasionally mixed with derivatives of Greek or Latin, was basically that of their territorial heritage. Yet this was the class of people, which 'the urban bourgeoisie' and the army relied upon for agricultural products and other goods.<sup>336</sup> They did not, however, wish to open their ranks to the peasants. According to Rostovtzeff, the peasantry was always outside the civilisation of the Empire and grew increasingly resentful of the urban elite, 'hives of drones', as Rostovtzeff calls them.<sup>337</sup> 'The activity of the urban middle class degenerated into a systematic exploitation of the lower toiling classes...The exclusiveness of the bourgeoisie...prevented the lower classes from raising themselves to a higher level and improving their material welfare...Thus the burden of supporting the life of the state lay entirely in the working classes and caused a rapid decline of their material welfare.'<sup>338</sup>

Rostovtzeff defines the ancient bourgeoisie in economic terms, as a class of men who had become successful as a result of their own efforts or through inheritance and held a certain level of wealth. These people lived off the interest accumulated from their investments. The main distinction between the bourgeoisie and other classes was the fact

<sup>335</sup> Rostovtzeff, *SEHRE* vol. 1 p. xi.

<sup>336</sup> *SEHHW* vol. 1 p.115 f

<sup>337</sup> *SEHHW* vol. 1 p.113

that they were not professionals, craftsmen or employees, but investors and employers of free and forced labour.<sup>339</sup> According to Rostovtzeff, the more advanced sectors of the ancient economy were established by this bourgeoisie who were essentially the forerunners in implementing an 'ancient profit motivated capitalism'.<sup>340</sup>

The bourgeoisie is 'the average citizen...not an aristocrat by birth and wealth...He is a middle class landowner, a businessman, or a rentier, well-to-do but not extremely rich'.<sup>341</sup> This class is clearly idealised by Rostovtzeff in both of his works on social and economic history of antiquity. For Rome during the Julius-Claudius dynasty, Rostovtzeff claimed, this class was the leading economic and social force and on this class rested the power of the emperors.<sup>342</sup> In his *SEHWW* Rostovtzeff emphasises the 'sturdy character' of the Hellenistic bourgeoisie and its commitment to maintain Greek culture for the benefit of livelihood. 'In my opinion', he states, 'it was the city bourgeoisie that was chiefly responsible for the great struggle for liberty carried on by the cities [of the Hellenistic world]'.<sup>343</sup>

Bowersock's critical statement of the unsatisfactory nature of Rostovtzeff's thesis explains it as resulting directly from his exile. He suggests that Rostovtzeff wanted to find in the Roman Empire of the *Antonius* age (238-244 AD), the period which he considers the highly flourishing era of the Roman Empire, a ruling class based on the merchants and entrepreneurs for whom he had much appreciation. The mistake that Rostovtzeff made, according to Bowersock and most other critics, is his presupposition of a third century capitalist economy, which was more important than agriculture during this period.<sup>344</sup>

The rural and urban peasants found an opportunity for rebellion, as they became more associated with the Roman army. This army, by the third century, did not only acquire wealth but a social position as well. This alliance between the rural proletariat and the military led to the destruction of what was to Rostovtzeff the most important social class of the third century, the 'urban bourgeoisie'.<sup>345</sup> The breakdown of the empire

<sup>338</sup> *SEHRE* vol. 1 p. xi

<sup>339</sup> *SEHWW* vol.1. p.115 f

<sup>340</sup> *SEHRE* vol. 2 p. 543 nI. Cf. Meyer (1948) p. 369. 'These judgements and values of Rostovtzeff reveal a pattern of social ideology, which probably took form during the turbulent transition from Czarism to the Soviet Union. Rostovtzeff's understanding of the term 'bourgeoisie' must also be placed in the context of pre-Soviet Russian society. The Russian nobility was truly a 'middle class', drawing its income both from commercial and industrial enterprise and from rationalised agriculture.'

<sup>341</sup> *SEHWW* vol. 1 p. 163.

<sup>342</sup> *SEHRE* vol. 1 p 103.

<sup>343</sup> *SEHWW* vol. 1 p. 166.

<sup>344</sup> Wes (1990). p. 19.

<sup>345</sup> Wes (1990). p. 18.

henceforth lay in the intrinsic hostility between the 'progressive bourgeoisie' and the more backward masses of the countryside. The revolution of the *humiliores*, in an alliance with the military, against the *honestiores*, was an essentially social rebellion, which resulted from the deliberate exclusiveness of the ruling class in Rome. The army during the 3<sup>rd</sup> century fought against the bourgeoisie and continued their pressure until the social prestige of the elite was completely eliminated and they were forced to 'lay prostrate under the feet of the half-barbarian soldiery.'<sup>346</sup> Rostovtzeff viewed the Roman army of the third century, the primary force in government at that time, 'as a class conscious mass of proletarians assaulting the bourgeoisie'.<sup>347</sup> That this revolution included the bulk of the masses is an idea that has received much criticism. Last offers the contrasting opinion that the prime movers in the struggle were the army with its leaders, and the masses maintained a more or less passive attitude, or in certain places gave tacit support to the movement. Momigliano interprets Rostovtzeff's military theory by stating the red army of the third century ruined the Roman State of the Caesars, just as the Red Army of the twentieth century ruined the Russian State of the Czars. Although the evidence does not support his thesis in relation to the fall of Rome, Rostovtzeff, because of his personal experiences and his admiration for the bourgeoisie, drew parallels with the Russian experience of 1917.

A.H.M. Jones' criticism of the *SEHRE* also rests with Rostovtzeff's treatment of the army in the third century. He states that Rostovtzeff's thesis is based on weak evidence at best; that the army of the third century was recruited largely from the peasantry. Rostovtzeff failed to comment on the largely hereditary nature of the third century Roman army and that their raids were disruptive not only to the cities of the empire but frequently the country and the peasantry itself. Momigliano stated that Rostovtzeff's image of the Roman army of the third century and its collaboration with the peasantry to undermine the power of the bourgeoisie 'took hold of him'. He was unable to integrate this theory with his later interpretation, which evolved after his preoccupation with Russia had paled. The fall of the empire, Rostovtzeff wrote later, was due to a combination of constant civil war and fierce attacks by external enemies.

The plan for Rostovtzeff's *Social and Economic History of the Hellenistic World* was similar to his earlier great work; illustrations, thoroughly described, and exhaustive explanatory notes. For Rostovtzeff the Hellenistic world was 'a stupendous creation of the Greek genius and it had far reaching influence on the future. The influence lies mainly in

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<sup>346</sup> *SEHRE* vol. 6. p. 495.

<sup>347</sup> Jones (1948) p. 361.

the field of literature, art, religion, philosophy, science and learning, but it was considerable also in the social and economic sphere.<sup>348</sup> The treatment of the period was much more detailed than that of his *SEHRE* and Rostovtzeff himself admitted in 1941 that if the Roman Empire had been done on the same massive scale as the *SEHHW*, it would have occupied 'a shelf-full of volumes'. In this work, the economic aspects of the Hellenistic World are given a full attention. Rostovtzeff introduces us to the beginnings of the Hellenistic world in chapter two when he describes the economic problems of the Greek and Persian worlds in the 4<sup>th</sup> century BC; problems provided the impetus for Alexander's conquests and the Hellenisation of the East through Greek migrations.<sup>349</sup> He continues with the disruption of the fifth century equilibrium in Greece between production and demand and how it was losing its export markets for both agricultural and industrial products when new centres of industry and agriculture were growing, especially in Thrace, the Bosphorus kingdom, Italy and Sicily.

If it is natural to assume that if the establishment of a *porto-franco* in Delos had such a disadvantageous influence on the trade at Rhodes, it must have had the same effect on Athens. Regarding this factor, the evidence at hand offers us no indication.<sup>350</sup> Part of Rostovtzeff's aim, is that the Hellenistic period was a 'good historical period', in which the cultural superiority of the Greeks brought civilisation to much more advanced technology and a higher state of development compared to the 'inferior races' of the Eastern Orient. In a Presidential Address delivered before the American Historical Association at Chattanooga on December 28 in 1935, Rostovtzeff stated emphatically that during and after the period of Alexander 'the Greek city-state definitely and finally came out of its political and cultural isolation and tried to absorb and to Hellenise the Near East.'<sup>351</sup> In contrast to Rostovtzeff's theory of a Greek intent to Hellenisation we can refer to Peter Green and previously to Hasebroek who both entirely reject the "pernicious myth" that Alexander and his successor kings and for that matter Greeks of the fourth and third centuries in general, consciously sought to bring their 'enlightened' culture to the barbarians.

For Rostovtzeff, civilised society depends on the cultural elite for its survival. The declining influence of that segment of society is a major factor in the downfall of both the Roman world and the Hellenistic world as well. This idea, the 'barbarisation of culture by

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<sup>348</sup> *SEHHW* vol. 2 p.131

<sup>349</sup> *SEHHW* vol. 1. p.124 f.

<sup>350</sup> *SEHHW* vol. 2. p.742

the uneducated masses' is, according to Brent Shaw, one characteristic of Western historical scholarship of the period in which Rostovtzeff is writing. Rostovtzeff flatly states that the Macedonian soldiers and commercially interested Greeks who 'exploited' the peoples of the Hellenistic kingdoms, could in no way be considered culturally elite.

A. Momigliano asserted that Rostovtzeff is 'essentially correct in assuming that both the Hellenisation and Romanisation of the territories of the Roman Empire resulted from the activities of the urban middle class.'<sup>352</sup> But Rostovtzeff did not make a thorough enough study of the problems of political liberty in the ancient world. He oversimplifies the economic structure of the Hellenistic/Roman era and never defines the term 'bourgeoisie' in detail. He also neglects the social structure of peasant life, because he focuses so heavily on the middle classes and the activities of the urban centres.<sup>353</sup> For Rostovtzeff, in both his works, the bourgeoisie were primarily responsible for the accomplishments of the Hellenistic and Roman worlds.

Michael Rostovtzeff's works culminated in a complex attempt to describe the social, political and economic achievements and failures of both the Hellenistic and Roman world. Experiences and turbulence of his own time often overcast his interpretations, as was the case in the writings of many other well-known ancient historians, such as Meyer and Beloch. Rostovtzeff offered historians and non-historians a view of the Greco-Roman world, which was more enriched by a combination of sources creating a synthesis which may reflect on the downfall of Rome as a mirror image of the downfall of Russia. His knowledge was vast. Archaeology, papyrology, numismatics, epigraphy and monuments all served to enlighten his readers in ways seldom seen before.

New approaches to the study of ancient social and economic history since the death of Rostovtzeff in 1952 reveal the weaknesses of his findings and the bias in his interpretations. Momigliano called Rostovtzeff's approach cynically 'more intuitive than logical, as most Russians are, and therefore he seldom thought out his theories clearly'.<sup>354</sup> This is a rather harsh criticism. The two *Social and Economic Histories* are certainly of high scholarly quality with regard to the detail and depth of historical analysis. However, Rostovtzeff's analogies are certainly extreme and anachronistic. It seems, though, that his modern interpretations are not so much dominated by his lacking knowledge of the

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<sup>351</sup> Rostovtzeff (1930) p. 205.

<sup>352</sup> Momigliano (1954) p. 101.

<sup>353</sup> Momigliano (1954) p. 103.

<sup>354</sup> Momigliano (1954) p. 103.

historical sources, but rather unfortunately driven by his own bitter experience and political agenda.

In respect of Rostovtzeff's position within the Bücher-Meyer Controversy, we can conclude, that he regarded especially the 3<sup>rd</sup> century AD, with its political and economic problems, as exemplifying the demise of his own aristocratic class in Russia. Although this outstanding encyclopaedically-minded ancient historian has shown great interest and an ability to synthesise all aspects of ancient social and political life, methodological questions regarding the nature of a sound historical evaluation are not sufficiently addressed. Together with the problem of coping with the burning questions of his times and his class origin, this led Rostovtzeff to make a modern assumption about the nature of the ancient economy.<sup>355</sup>

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<sup>355</sup> For a detailed bibliography on Rostovtzeff see Wes (1990).

### *Résumé*

The immediate aftermath of the Bücher-Meyer Controversy shows a rich variety of interpretations and levels of understanding of the problems surrounding the ancient economy. Each mentioned contribution has its point and foundation. However, in the light of the most recent literature, it seems that although more authors than ever before take notice of the controversy, relatively little effort has been made to understand the complexity of this important part in the history of historiography, apart from Schneider, Mazza and implicitly Finley. This is partly due to the perception of the controversy itself amongst its contributors and its immediate aftermath. There has never been open debate about all the connecting issues, perhaps due to continuous ideological and scholarly differences.

Oertel, it seems, discusses mainly the sources of dispute and to a significantly lesser extent the problem of concept formation and the difference in the philosophical historical methodology between the debaters. Nevertheless, Oertel chose two very interesting terms in order to separate the sides. According to him, Bücher's position is 'negative' not only in respect of the denial of the existence of capitalism in antiquity, but also in terms of his strategy of argument, which to a degree became the way of the 'anti-modernists' always eager to state what the ancient 'economy' (if the word 'economy' is at all appropriate) was not about. The 'positive' theories of Meyer, Beloch, Pöhlmann and Rostovtzeff had a clear vision of antiquity not because of superior knowledge of antiquity, but by making swift comparisons between modern and ancient political and therefore economic phenomena. As we have seen, these authors have shown plenty of imagination in the evaluation of the historical detail and when it comes to filling the gaps in the testimony of the ancient writers and chronologists. Meyer, Rostovtzeff and many who saw themselves in the historicist tradition were often quick to make conjectural statements about the modern character of certain periods of the economy of antiquity. Whether their accounts are correct or whether they include very problematic assumptions, as well as wild conjecture, should be clear to the reader too. However, one may argue that it is contrary to the ethos of a historian to make swift generalisations about a possible modern character of a particular historical event or entity such as the ancient economy, since we still know too little about the past and face many unresolved methodological problems.

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The revision of contemporary literature mentioning the Bücher-Meyer Controversy is still incomplete. However, what arises from the contents is that it appears insufficient to judge the controversy as a matter of whether antiquity as a whole was 'primitive' or 'modern'. It would perhaps be useful to investigate the methodological foundations of both sides and to work on a new historical conceptual framework that allows us to understand the ancient economy in a more complex and accurate way.

## Appendix 1 to Part III – Hasebroek’s Essay ‘On Ancient Economic History’

We have selected an important but largely unrecognised paper by an important author. Hasebroek’s work appears here for the very first time in an English translation. Where the translation of certain terms from German into English created some difficulty due to the different etymological history of some of the terms, the German word is put in [] signs..

### ‘On Ancient Economic History’

*Inaugural address by Prof. Dr, Johannes Hasebroek held on February, 6<sup>th</sup> 1926 of  
the University of Zurich*

*Original Text in Neue Züricher Zeitung 147 Nr. 266. 18/2/1926*

It is due to the peculiar development which classical ancient studies have taken, that the problem of the ancient economy languished for a long time. The problem of the material basis of the cultures of antiquity belongs to the most disputed in the subject of ancient history, and we are still today very far away from understanding ancient economic history. Already the fundamental problem of the degree of economic development is subject to extremely opposed opinions. As it currently looks, two theories are irreconcilably opposing each other. For one theory, the economy of the 5<sup>th</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> century is already highly developed, an economy of a more or less modern character, a truly national economy [*Volkswirtschaft*] with a far reaching inter-local commodity exchange; the other theory does not let antiquity grow beyond the stage of the closed household economy until its decline. Although the oikos theory is faulty, on the contrary, there can be no doubt that we face with the 5<sup>th</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> century an unmatched boom of the Greek intellectual culture, we still see a relatively primitive economic culture. The big break for the economic development of antiquity lies with the beginning of the Hellenic period, and this new historical epoch reveals itself even more dramatically the more we compare it with what is still missing in the 4<sup>th</sup> century.

The correct understanding of the degree of the development of trade and industry in the 5<sup>th</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> century has to be decisive for the characterisation of the general economic

structure of the pre-Hellenic epoch. As with industry as well as with trade, the import of modern economic concepts and ideas into the pre-Hellenic economy became fatal and led to shallowness in interpreting the very particular ancient economic phenomena. This is especially true of the transmission of the concept of trade policy [*Handelspolitik*] of the mercantilist and modern state in the pre-Hellenic period. They assume a political orientation towards trade by reinterpreting political factors as expressions of trade and trade domination, which present the driving force for the whole politics of the pre-Hellenic *polis* to be an expression of commercial goals. It has also been taken for granted that the great leading statesmen of that time had commercial interests implicit in their policies. However, such assumptions lack the necessary conditions, mainly: that commercial activity is not developed in the Greek world, by the state and by the community, expressed by the masses of its trading citizens.

The Greek inter-local, professionally executed trade [*Handel*] in the 4<sup>th</sup> century is still carried out without capital. The supporting forces of that trade are proletarians, mostly craftsmen, who stand in sharp contrast to the rich and the well-off, the capital-owning social groups concentrating mainly on the money lending business, in order to stay outside the trading business. The complete separation of money owner and trader, which exists today, was not a fundamental characteristic. The credit lender pockets the profit made by trade; the merchant himself, if he gains a fortune, he pulls out of trade business. Under such a condition the assumption of a trade and merchant aristocracy in this epoch also runs into difficulties. The capital-owning landlord only engages in petty trade with the large-scale farmer or aristocrat and exploits by imposing customs and contributions on those who engage in trade. Only by an impoverished existence does the aristocrat reach the professional *Emporie*. Only real merchant cultures have innate aristocratic instincts. Not one reliable source states that the Greek aristocracy would have found a new means of acquisition in the merchant profession.

However, the Greek inter-locally operating professional merchant is not only proletarian, but belongs usually also to the class of non-citizens and is a foreigner who does not possess full civil rights. Also the Greek crafts are largely dependent on a non-Greek population, who are settlers for a longer or shorter time (therefore still travelling), who are politically disadvantaged. The Greek *Metoiike* is surely disadvantaged compared to the full citizen in a private legal and a political sense, but in the respect of the execution of his profession never regarded like the 'guest' in the medieval city. The foreign policy of the Greek State is characterised by the tendency not to keep away the trading and crafting

foreigner as an unbearable competitor, but rather to attract him.<sup>356</sup> The immense importance of the *Metoikie*, common to all Greek states, as long as they are not totally apart from the main exchange, proves to what a weak extent the Greek full-citizen dominated trade and craftsmanship.

The full-citizens of the Greek states cannot be regarded as representatives of labour and of the national production. The capitalistic spirited citizens of the medieval cities were primarily merchants and craftsmen; the ideal *polis* citizen is primarily farmer and landlord. The disrespect, not only for all physical but also for any technical professions, is deeply innate in the Greeks. Nevertheless all technical work is mainly based on free labour, not on forced labour; but it rests mainly upon free *Metoikie*, not upon the full-citizen. This disrespect for all technical labour, which confronts us even in statements from that time to such a large extent, is not simply an aristocratic prejudice, which was formulated solely as an ethical theory of the Greeks expressing a strong reaction against the failing democracy. We are faced with one of the deepest expressions of the peculiar psychology and world view [*Weltanschauung*] of the Greeks compared with the human being of the occidental world - a characteristic of the Greek mind. The desire for immense profit beyond the sustaining of one's needs is also innate to Greek life. However this desire, viewed in an ideal-typical way, finds itself satisfied with other means than the work expressed in the merchant and craftsmen activity.

Trade and craftsmanship of that time are not national but rather cosmo-political and lie to a strong degree outside the state, for the state, in a state-legal sense, consists of the amount of citizens necessary in order to sustain the self-sufficiency [of the state] and not of the foreigners who settle on its territory. The Greek city does not know any promotion of trade to benefit the trading class amongst its citizens. The state therefore does not know the concept of the duty of protection, the fundamental principle of all trade politics in a true sense.<sup>357</sup> Its behaviour towards traders is only dominated by two factors: [firstly] the opportunity of the exploitation of trade for fiscal purposes and [second] the desire to use trade for the very elementary nutrition problem. The driving forces of all power development of the Greek states are not commercial, but blunt imperialistic aims. It is this primitive, but a dominating radical Greek democracy, which expresses still the dominating desire to subject the weaker, in order to make him obedient, to live off his costs [and] to put all labour onto his shoulders. With Korinth, Miletus, Athens and the other cities, we do

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<sup>356</sup> foreign policy = immigration policy

<sup>357</sup> trade politics perhaps economic policy = *Handelspolitik*

not deal with closed trade areas, but rather with political centres of power. The Greek state founded its colonies not for commercial reasons, like the mercantilist state did, but solely in order to get rid of its surplus population. The daughter-city is not connected to the mother-city by commercial ties, but merely by religious ones. The Greek 'trade contract' is not a trade contract in our [modern] sense. It is solely a supply contract, which one polis makes with the other *polis* in order to secure the nutrition of its citizens or the supply of necessary materials for its shipbuilding. The Greek 'trade embargo' is not a trade embargo, but a general traffic embargo, which coincides with the ancient principle of foreign policy.<sup>358</sup>

Only after the emergence of the great Hellenic complex of cities, which creates besides large political areas also economic territories, one can speak of a trade policy with associated trade political phenomena, which are capable of standing comparison with modern phenomena.<sup>359</sup>

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<sup>358</sup> foreign policy = immigration policy

<sup>359</sup> modern = *neuzeitlich*. Hasebroek does not define *neuzeitlich*, but it seems from the context he refers to the mercantile states of the 16<sup>th</sup> century.

## Conclusion

After having elucidated the original arguments between Bücher and Meyer, including additional contributions regarding the nature of the ancient economy, we can draw the following conclusions:

Firstly, the view that this controversy can be defined as being between 'primitivism versus modernism', as asserted by many contemporary scholars, is based on a misrepresentation of the original debate. That is an inadequate oversimplification of Bücher's and Meyer's position. However, this is not to categorically deny the modernising analogies used by Meyer, or that Bücher assigned only a limited scope to the role of exchange and trade in classical antiquity.

Secondly, our analysis of the debate about a possible methodological re-orientation of historical studies, which coincided with the Bücher-Meyer Controversy, has had an influence on the perception of the original positions, and has thus made a solution to this debate ever more difficult. As we have also seen, this debate on method was highly ideologically charged. It provides us with an impressive example of how the historical interpretation is influenced by particular philosophical, and also ideological presuppositions that put both Bücher and Meyer, whether to their liking or not, into opposite camps of the political academic spectrum. As shown, the political debates that also carried on within academia in Germany during the last quarter of the 19<sup>th</sup> century and first quarter of the 20<sup>th</sup> century were not necessarily the same issues that are debated today. Also, although Bücher and Meyer may have been influenced by the ideological quarrels and political demands imposed upon them by their institutional authorities, which added to the inconclusive outcome of the controversy, it was more the continuing misuse of this debate as a battle ground for ideologies that made a solution to it impossible. This is particularly true in the light of the fact that the writings of a number of contemporary authors in this subject seem to create the impression that the controversy never took place, and proceed by committing similar errors that Meyer and Bücher were guilty of.<sup>360</sup>

Thirdly, unfortunately, no matter how laudable Max Weber's solution to the controversy was, his theory of historical concept formation did not resolve the methodological and conceptual difficulties that deeply divided Meyer and Bücher. It is only recently that the historical scholarship has begun to study the intellectual depth of

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Weber's writings about economic history of antiquity in greater detail. We noted that Weber's solution to the controversy should not be viewed as an attempted middling compromise between Bücher and Meyer. Instead sarcasm aimed at methodological discourse and continuing methodological ignorance filled the lack of understanding between the sides during the 1920s and 30s. Yet in 1975, M. I. Finley still saw reason to criticise the lack of interest in philosophical questions - a point that was reaffirmed by Meikle only six years ago in 1995. To address these theoretical historiographical issues adequately, which are directly relevant to this controversy, in order determine how far a historian can generalise over the historical sources, or how a particular historical concept was formed, whether there are historical facts, and how the historian should be assessing his/her own code of scientific practice, would perhaps help to overcome these tall-grown walls that have emerged within the historical scholarship during the aftermath of this famous controversy. All in all, it is hoped that this study has contributed to a better and more detailed understanding of the Bücher-Meyer Controversy and its associated literature.

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<sup>360</sup> This point was previously made by Austin & Vidal-Naquet (1977) p. 7.

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### <sup>i</sup> Format of References

According to the *Notes to OUP Authors* (1990) p. 13 'any reasonable system of reference can be followed if it is clear and consistent'. Because of the amount of German books, the Umlaut in the title has been left in. For more precise references the publisher's name has been added. See also the key to all abbreviations at the beginning of the thesis.